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REVELLO



OR,

THE RIVAL ROVERS.

A Romance of Outlawry on Blue Waters. A Companion Story to the "Red Raper."

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE EVE OF DEATH.

A CRUEL, merciless storm had swept over the Gulf of Mexico, wrecking many a gallant vessel, sending brave men to the bottom and dashing upon the coast the wreckage of a fleet of white-winged craft, from the stately cruiser to the small fishing-smack.

Fighting against fate to the last, an armed cruiser had hoped to weather the storm, for her commander was a perfect sailor, fearless and skilled, and had fought hard for victory over death, even when his craft was almost a wreck.

The dark faces and uniforms of the crew showed that they were not Americans—that is, from the United States. They were from the

THE PIRATE CRUISER

"IT IS THE PIRATE, THE OCEAN RAPIER," CRIED THE AFRICAN. CAPTAIN REVELLO'S FACE TURNED ASHEN IN HUE. THAT WAS HIS FREEBOOTER RIVAL!

sunny land of Mexico. Well trained seamen, they had stood at their posts bravely, and shrunk not when they beheld the remorseless waves making a wreck of their vessel and tearing man after man from his place of duty to bear him away to die.

The masts of the vessel were gone, so she carried no flag, but her rig had been that of a brig, and her hull revealed a perfect outline for beauty and swift sailing qualities.

Torn from their lashings some of her guns had dashed through the bulwarks, leaving great gaping wounds, and her deck and all showed the evidence of having seen hot service in battle before the elements had visited upon her their wrath.

The officers stood about in silence, awaiting the commands of their captain, who clung to the stump of the mizzenmast, his face undaunted, his manner stern and determined.

It was evident that bitter thoughts were surging through his brain, for his eyes flashed and his lips were set with firm resolve.

It was a handsome face to gaze upon, one to fascinate, to command, for the features were regular and expressive and the eyes intensely full of power.

The form of the man was elegant and his dripping uniform, for the seas broke over the vessel unceasingly, was well fitting and handsome.

At last an impatient execration came from his lips, followed by the words:

"I half believe that I have been tricked."

His dark face flushed with anger now, and again he muttered an impatient imprecation.

"I will know the truth, even though the knowledge is followed by instant death," he said, grimly.

With this he made his way aft to the cabin companionway and entered, after issuing an order in a low tone to one of his officers who stood there.

In the companionway stood a negro of hideous mien and gorgeous dress, for his attire was of velvet and he wore a number of precious stones in rings, earrings and bracelets.

He was deformed, but of giant strength and cat-like quickness.

"Where is the boy, Topaz?" asked the captain, and the negro uttering no reply simply pointed on into the cabin.

The face of the negro was brutal yet intelligent, for there was that in it to admire as well as fear.

"Topaz, where is the boy?" repeated the captain, and he spoke in the Spanish tongue.

"The senor will find him in the cabin," was the reply now, and the tone was hardly respectful.

Entering the cabin the captain stood an instant gazing about him.

Luxuriously furnished as it was, the dash of salt water down upon the velvet carpet and silk-covered furniture had ruined all, and there was every evidence that the dweller there had given up hope of more comfort in his sea-home, his beautiful vessel, which now threatened to be the coffin for himself and his crew.

The glance he cast about him was a quick and angry one, and his eyes fell upon a form kneeling by the divan, the face buried in the hands.

Was it in prayer that the form thus knelt upon the wet floor, or was it on account of the reeling and plunging of the ship?

The seas were breaking wildly over the dismayed vessel, and to stand unaided was impossible, for the men were lashed to the bulwarks upon the decks, so perhaps the attitude was one of prayer.

The form was slender and graceful, that of a mere youth, and it was clad in uniform.

"Well, do you find your prayers of any use to you, boy, in this your moment of terror?" savagely demanded the captain, after regarding the youth an instant in silence, the look upon his face becoming almost one of hatred and fury as he gazed.

A cry broke from the lips of the boy as he heard the stern utterance, for he had believed himself alone. He sprang to his feet only to be hurled down upon the divan by a sudden violent wrenching of the vessel, tossed upon a more violent sea than usual.

"It is a moment, senor, when prayer should be upon the lips of all, yours as well as mine," was the low response of the youth, though it was not spoken with a tone of disrespect.

"Hail bold words to come from a cabin-boy to his captain, I swear!" almost savagely retorted the captain.

"At such a moment, senor, when death stares us in the face, when the vessel is a wreck settling to its doom, and the doom of all, there is no rank to forbid the utterance of honest words."

"Bolder and bolder you are! but I have come here, boy, for a talk with you."

"And I was praying for strength, senor, to ask Topaz to bring you here for a talk with you," was the quickly spoken response.

"Ah! and what have you to say to me?"

"I would first know of your reason for a talk with me, Senor Captain?"

"Speak first!"

"Not until I know what you have to say to me, senor."

"Boy, I will force you to tell why you would have the negro Topaz ask me to come here to you?"

"Senor Captain, with death only a few minutes away, you cannot force me to do anything from fear."

"You came here to see me, and when you have told me why, I will also speak, for I have a secret to tell you—a strange story to relate."

"By Heaven, but I believe I am right in the suspicion I hold regarding you!" savagely exclaimed the Mexican commander.

"And may I ask, senor, what suspicion you hold regarding me?"

"I believe you to be a woman!"

"I am a woman, *Bertrando the Buccaneer*," was the low but firm response of the supposed youth.

CHAPTER II.

THE CABIN-BOY'S SECRET.

"You a woman?"

The words were spoken exultantly, as he gazed with a strange look upon his cabin-boy.

The woman had sunk down upon the divan and buried her face in her hands, as though the confession had been her shame.

The man leaned heavily against the companionway, to steady himself with the rolling of the vessel, and again repeated his words:

"You a woman?"

"I have confessed it, yes," was the reply.

"And what does a woman do here, disguised as a cabin-boy in my cabin?"

The question was asked in a tone of severe command or reproach, yet no answer came.

"I have asked you, woman, why you are here?" demanded the Mexican captain still more sternly. "Answer!"

"I am here for a purpose, Rudolph Revello, *Bertrando the Buccaneer*, or by whatever other name you wish to be known," was the response, in a tone almost fierce, and the woman arose as she spoke and leaning against the door of a state-room she faced the man fearlessly.

There was defiance in her eyes now and an almost wicked expression upon her fine face.

"Why are you here in my cabin, I asked you?" repeated the man, an ugly expression in his eyes.

To his surprise a laugh came from the woman, but more bitter and defiant it was than merry.

"Will you answer me?"

"Yes! I am here for revenge!"

The words were full of intense hatred.

"For revenge against me?"

"Yes, to track you down."

"Well, and what have you gained?" contemptuously.

"What have I gained, Rudolph Revello? Your death!"

"Bah! If the ship goes down I will die—yes, but wherein lies your revenge, for I will see you also go down to the depths of perdition with me."

"My loss will be little felt only by one human being upon earth," and the voice quivered, the eyes dimmed with tears.

But, choking back her emotion the woman continued:

"But if you die, then a monster in human form will be taken from the earth, and men will no longer turn pale when they hear the name spoken of the Red Rapier."

"In what way does the Red Rapier concern you?" fiercely.

"I will tell you. Years ago you came to a happy home upon the shores of Mobile Bay and robbed it of a young girl, one who believed your stories and sacrificed herself to save her father, as she believed."

"She loved another, but wedded you, to find out that you were, though the captain of a Mexican cruiser, also secretly a pirate, leaving no trace of your outlaw acts, however."

"You made the one I speak of your wife, and upon the seas a child was born, a little boy who the mother hoped would win the father from his evil ways."

"Vain the hope, for it was years before he again took his wronged wife to her girlhood home, and there she found death had come, for her mother had died of a broken heart and her father had become a madman through his sorrow."

"The dear father, made a madman by you, fell by your merciless hand, and then, driven away by American cruisers, you fled to your old island retreat to refit your vessel to again become a freebooter."

"In that island retreat you left your wife and boy, saying you would return, and in time would give up your double life of corsair and cruiser; but you sailed, intending to do a still greater wrong toward an innocent girl who had trusted you, for, upon your vessel went one of the islanders as a cabin-boy."

"You knew not the cheat, and your trusted cabin-boy saw you land upon the Mexican Coast, visit the home of the maiden you were to marry, and then boldly sail into Vera Cruz and report

to the Junta, unmindful of the fact that the black flag of the buccaneer had been more frequently floating over your vessel than had the colors of the land which you pretended to serve as a Mexican officer."

"This cabin-boy then knew that your pledges to your wife were false, that you would not give up your evil life, that you had deserted her and your little son, and intended to still go on in your career of crime."

"So the cabin-boy acted promptly, determined to save the Mexican maiden whom you intended to entice into a marriage with you, and to bring you to justice."

"With your own Government this cabin-boy dared not make terms, so he went on board the American schooner-of-war, *Spiteful*, then in the harbor of Vera Cruz, and told all to her commander, who, by a strange coincidence, was the man whom your wife had loved in the long ago."

"This officer heard the story and entered into the plot to capture the Mexican cruiser at sea, convinced that the Rattlesnake brig-of-war was none other than the Red Rapier."

"So a letter was forged and sent to you, pretending to come from the Mexican maiden who loved you, and hastily you went to sea to visit her home upon the coast."

"The American schooner had gone before you; but, once outside, the tornado struck your vessel and thus saved you from being swung up as a pirate at the yard-arm of the *Spiteful*."

"Your vessel is wrecked, Rudolph Revello, and soon you must die; but I feel some joy in the thought that I at least brought you and your pirate craft to your destruction, for I sent you to sea!"

"Had it not been for this tornado I would have seen you hanged—thus avenging my father and mother and myself."

"Then I would have sought the island retreat, where my son awaits me, and, going to my old home would have dug up the pirate treasure you had hidden away, held my own counsel and lived a life of luxury—my boy and I."

"Now, Rudolph Revello, the storm has changed all. You have escaped the yard-arm, but you will not escape your doom, to die here in these mad waters, with all your sins unforgiven, a man accursed."

"I cannot see my boy again; I cannot shape his life as I had hoped, for I, too, must die with you: but I have at least the joy of seeing you go to your death."

"Now you know my secret, know me as I am, not your cabin-boy, but your wife. Heaven will never show mercy to the guilty soul of Rudolph Revello, the Pirate!"

CHAPTER III.

HER DOOM.

THE Mexican captain, who bore the stigma of being secretly a buccaneer, did not change countenance under the scathing words of his wife, disguised as a cabin-boy.

Had not death been staring him in the face he would have been glad indeed to have her there in his power, that he, too, might seek revenge for her having tracked him down in his villainy.

To his credit, be it said, and it is little enough to say for him, he had always loved the woman, whom he had lured from her home to become the wife of a sea outlaw.

She was beautiful in face and form, and had wholly won his heart, so far as he had a heart to win.

He had kept her with him at sea when not upon cruises which took him into Mexican ports, and their son had been born at sea, upon his vessel.

To this boy, in his sixth year at the time this story opens, he was fondly attached, but his curse was his love of gold. He had turned his vessel into a pirate to obtain it, had determined to desert his wife for the time being and wed a Mexican maiden of vast wealth.

Now he heard how he had been tracked and trapped, and could only feel a glad revenge that the one who had brought this doom upon him should also perish with him. As he heard the cold confession of the woman that she had loved another, that she had gone to that other as a means to bring him to the gallows, all the ugly passions of the man were aroused, and he only regretted that it was not now in his power to be avenged upon her.

The tornado howled overhead like a thousand demons of the sea rushing by; the waves were dashed high in the air, and then, torn to atoms, fell in masses upon the decks of the dismayed vessel.

The wreck staggered like a drunken man, and each wave threatened to send her beneath the sea forever.

Her wounds received in action, as pirate and cruiser, were strained open and the waters rushed in in steady streams, their weight slowly settling her down to doom.

The pumps were useless, and the men in sullen silence and despair had left them.

They expected death, felt sure of going down before long, and yet they clung for their lives to the bulwarks and whatever else offered

protection from being torn away by the mad seas.

At last the man spoke, for the first time uttering a word since the confession of the woman had begun.

What he said caused her to start in horror, and his face to light up with malignant hatred and triumph at the feeling that he had caused her to feel fear of him.

"Yes, Lucille, my wife, all is as you have said, all is the truth that has fallen from your lips, for I did, by carrying you away from your home, break your mother's heart, make a madman of your father and then take his life when he attacked me.

But you had for the while your sweet revenge in tracking me down, to foil me and bring me to death.

"Now I shall have my revenge, short-lived though it be, for I shall feel that you suffer horrors in your last moments.

"Perhaps I may escape, but *you* never can or shall.

"I shall take to the boats, I will be the one to go in the life-boat, for it and one other still remain, and it will not be overloaded I promise you, so the chances are in my favor, for the boat may live where the wreck will go down."

Then the man called out:

"Ho, Topaz!"

"Yes, senor," and the negro came to the cabin companionway.

"Say that I wish the boats prepared for leaving the vessel at once."

"Yes, senor," and the black disappeared.

"Now, my wife, my sweet Lucille, you shall feel what my revenge is, and you must know that while I escape, for my chances are even, you will go down with the ship, with this wreck as your tomb."

"My God! what would you do?" gasped the woman, struck by the malignant light in his face.

Before he could answer, Topaz appeared in the companionway. What he would have said was checked by a warning look and gesture from his commander, and he simply said:

"I obeyed your orders, senor."

"Ay, ay, good Topaz, we will soon be far away from this old wreck," was the answer, and turning to the woman, he continued:

"Now, Lucille, you shall know your doom."

"It can only be death," she added, having regained her wonderful nerve.

"Only death! yes; but such a death."

"I do not fear to die, though Heaven knows I would give life to see my boy once more."

"You should have thought of your boy before you sought to track me to my destruction."

"I care not for what you say, Captain Revello, and I am ready to meet my fate, be it what it may, so do your worst."

She spoke now with no semblance of fear, without a tremor in her voice.

"We will see whether you will not flinch when you know what your fate shall be."

"Never will you see me cower in fear to give you an atom of joy at my doing so, Rudolph Revello."

He smiled, and called out:

"Topaz!"

"Yes, senor."

"Get from the room yonder that set of double irons."

The negro made his way across the cabin as best he could, and entered the state-room.

Soon he appeared, holding in his hands heavy chains, to the ends of which were manacles.

The woman's face paled, but she remained perfectly calm.

"Now, Topaz," came the next order, given in a low tone, in which intense hatred was mingled with cruel joy:

"Clasp those manacles about the wrists and ankles of this woman in disguise, and pass the irons around the mast, so that she will go down with this wreck, which is to be her coffin."

CHAPTER IV.

THE SURVIVORS.

THE words of the Mexican captain fell savagely and remorselessly upon the ears of the woman so wholly at his mercy.

Upon that ship he was king, and an appeal to the crew would be of no avail.

Then, too, the crew could never hear her cry for mercy in that wild war of waters and howling of winds.

The deformed African even started at the stern words of his chief, and yet he made no remonstrance—no effort not to obey.

To the surprise of the man, the woman did not flinch. She did not show the horror he had hoped for, which was a matter of deep regret to the steel-hearted husband, for her fear, her suffering at such a moment was to be his joy, his revenge.

"You have heard your fate, Lucille!" said Captain Revello, determined to make her plead for mercy, for her pleading would be music to his ears.

"I have heard, Sir Pirate, and have but one wish."

"Name it."

"That you leave me alone to die."

"Have you no last words, no instructions regarding our boy?"

She started now, and her lips quivered, but she answered, calmly:

"I would not leave my son to the care of a tiger, and did I believe that you would escape, then would I long not to die; but I feel that you can not escape any more than I can, though you will not go down in irons."

"I have no more to say to you, Revello, so leave me alone in my last moments of life."

The reply the man would have made was arrested by a chorus of cries upon the deck.

"Breakers ahead!" was the cry, and with a bound the pirate captain rushed from the cabin, driving the negro before him, and the woman was left alone to her fate, ironed to the mast and with ankles and wrists encircled by the manacles.

The door of the cabin companionway she heard slammed to behind the retreating Mexican, and there came the sound of rushing feet upon the deck, and loud, wild cries, oaths and prayers mingled with the mad roar of the elements.

The brig rocked more violently, lurching and plunging and still drove on.

Darkness was just settling upon the sea and yet ahead could be seen a wall of foam upon which the wreck was driving with frightful speed.

The boats which the Mexican captain had claimed to have were useless, and the crew knew this fact well, yet they rushed to them and seized upon all that would float to save them.

Another moment, and upon a wave more savage and towering than the others the wreck was borne straight upon the white wall of foam.

There upon the crest she paused for a second and then came the frightful sinking down which ended in a crash that was terrible as the hull was wedged firmly upon the sunken rocks.

The following seas washed over her, sweeping all with them, tearing men away from where they were lashed to bulwarks and masts, and in an instant the decks were swept clean of every human being.

Off upon the mad waters they were borne to die; and curses and prayers again mingled with the howling winds until the men one by one sunk to death in the sea.

A few clung to the spars, rigging and timbers torn from the bulwarks, and there held out as long as strength lasted, and only put off their dreaded doom.

And yet all had not perished, for when the ship struck the Mexican captain had been near the life-boat and the negro had said to him:

"Cling to life-boat, senor!"

"It is useless."

"No, senor."

Something in the manner of the negro caused the chief to spring to the life-boat.

Topaz did the same, and there they found half a dozen unfortunates, but these were torn away with the fury of madmen by the Mexican and the African.

Away went the boat, tossed about like a cork in a mill-race, yet in it were the two who had sought its succor.

On, away over the seas drove the boat, which held up well, though full of water, and with the weight added of the Mexican and the negro.

As though content with having driven the wreck to destruction, the tornado ceased its fury suddenly, the winds sunk into gentle breezes, and the wild waters became calmer and calmer with each passing hour.

For a long while neither the Mexican nor the African uttered a word; then the former spoke:

"You were right, Topaz; the life-boat saved us, and I owe you my life."

"Not safe yet, senor," was the response.

"True, but we have not been saved from the wreck, while others perished, to be drowned now, or die of starvation, either."

"Senor Chief, think all die?"

"Yes, for how could any one escape?"

"The cabin-boy, too?"

"Ah, yes! he went down with the breaking up of the ship, for that blow made drift-wood of her, beyond all doubt."

"Maybe so," was the laconic response of the negro, and then he said:

"Topaz expected the wreck, so wanted to save life, and put into life-boat all that would repair it, for it was all smashed, as senor knows."

"Yes, it had two holes stove in it you could crawl through."

"Topaz has canvas to tack over it, and hammer and all in lockers, hidden away, with food and cask of water. We are all right, Senor Captain."

"Give me your hand, Topaz."

The African seemed pleased at the praise bestowed upon him by his chief, and held out his hand eagerly, while he remarked:

"Yes, we are all right, for the sail and oars are all lashed in the boat, and the cask of water and food are in the lockers."

"Yes, we are the sole survivors of the wreck, Topaz," was the triumphant response of the Mexican captain.

CHAPTER V.

THE LIFE-BOAT.

It was a long, fearful night to the Mexican captain, there in that sunken life-boat, whatever the negro might feel, for Rudolph Revello longed to live for his own selfish ends, and death was viewed by him with horror now that there were chances to escape it.

At last the morning dawned, and the sea was comparatively calm, the skies were cloudless.

Eagerly the two shipwrecked men gazed around them, and cheerily from the lips of the Mexican came the cry:

"Land, ho!"

"Yes, senor," complacently responded the negro.

It was only a barren island they saw, a league away; but it afforded an asylum for the moment, and they were drifting directly upon it.

"That tornado drove us well out of our course, Topaz, for I had no idea we were near any island, though in the darkness and storm I knew not which way we were driving."

"But that is land and will serve us well, for we can beach the boat and repair her."

"Yes, senor, we are safe now," was the response.

With some difficulty they reached the sandy beach, where the waves did not break hard, and the boat was hauled out and the things she carried were spread out upon the shore.

Topaz had provided well, for there was a stump mast with a small mainsail and jib wound tightly around it.

Then came four oars, lashed securely together, and in one locker was a cask of fresh water and a roll of bed-clothing.

In the other was a box of provisions so securely wrapped around with oiled canvas as to have been kept dry.

"Topaz, you are a wonder. But when did you do all this?" said the Mexican.

"The boats were stove, senor, and then I knew the life-boat would float, and prepared for the wreck."

"The men laughed at me, but I am alive now, while they are dead."

"You are right there, Topaz; but what is this?" and the Mexican came upon a roll of canvas.

"It is oiled canvas, and the hammer and tacks, senor, for repairing the boat."

Captain Revello gave a whistle of delight, and while the negro set about getting driftwood to build a fire, he began repairs upon the boat.

With the aid of dry driftwood and flints a fire was soon kindled, and a breakfast prepared and eaten, after a pull at a bottle of rum which Topaz very wisely had not forgotten.

The work of repairing the boat occupied the day, and that night they passed upon the island.

But the next day the boat was run into the water, and to the joy of both it leaked but little.

Then they set sail and steered away from the island, the compass also put in the locker by Topaz, proving a valuable acquisition to them, as Captain Revello soon got his bearings and laid his course in a direction which he knew would bring him across the path of vessels bound in and out of the Caribbean Sea, or at least to the shores of an inhabited country.

But several days passed and no sail came in sight, while they had also to weather a severe gale.

Their provisions and water ran low, and the face of Captain Revello began to look gloomy, while Topaz showed the same indifference that seemed a part of his nature.

"If we do not sight a sail, or make land in a couple of days more, Topaz, we will be out of provisions and water, and starve to death," he said.

"May be, senor, but it will be all right in the end," was the laconic response of Topaz, but whether it would be all right in the end to starve to death, or that they would be rescued, the African did not explain, and Captain Revello did not ask the question of him.

At last day dawned to find the cask empty and not a crumb of provisions left.

Expecting early succor they had been a little too generous in their use of them.

Captain Revello's face wore a more serious air, but Topaz looked as serene as ever.

"Sail ho, senor!" at last called out the negro, and with no more excitement than he would have done had he been upon the deck of a vessel with plenty of sails in sight.

"Whereaway?" was the joyful cry of Captain Revello, and he looked in the direction where the negro pointed.

"I see her!"

"It is a brig and it will cross our course, so we are saved, Topaz, saved!"

"Maybe!" was the complacent response, and then both turned their looks upon the distant sail, while the prow of the life-boat was headed to meet the stranger.

"It is a brig, as you see, Topaz, and an armed one from her rig."

"Yes, senor: Americano."

"You are right; but whatever she may prove to be we are saved."

"Yes, Senor Captain."
 "Don't make any mistake now in whatever story you tell."

"No, senor."
 "I wish you to tell what is the truth—that I am Captain Rudolph Revello, of the Mexican brig-of-war Rattlesnake, which was caught in the tornado and wrecked."

"Yes, senor."
 "All on board were lost, and we clung to the life-boat, which was stove in, and managed, with some drifting rigging and canvas we picked up, to repair her so she would keep afloat."

"Yes, Senor Chief."
 "I intend to return to Mexico, of course, Topaz, and you are to go with me, and I will report to the Junta the loss of my vessel."

"I have some precious stones with me in my belt, so am not poor, and I shall wed with all dispatch the Senorita Marcelite Castile, and depart from Mexico, for I have reason to know, Topaz, that the cabin-boy betrayed to the commander of the American schooner-of-war, Spiteful, the fact that my brig was a pirate as well as a cruiser, and I might lose my head, should that officer return to Vera Cruz and make his report to my Government."

"Yes, senor! but will the chief give up the sea?"

"If I marry the Senorita Castile, Topaz, her gold will give me ample fortune to live upon, for I will see to it that her father, the Don, is short-lived, and that all his wealth also goes to his daughter."

"But if the Senor Chief does not marry the Senorita Marcelite?" asked the negro, and his tone was not so indifferent as was its wont.

"In that case, Topaz, I believe I shall go to sea again."

"The senor has no ship, no men!"

"No, but I will get them, Topaz, for if I go to sea again it will not be as Captain Revello of the Mexican Navy, but as a free rover—under another name, for I must have gold—much gold, Topaz, and I can get it by levying tribute on every craft I board. See! we are sighted from the brig and are saved!"

"Senor, it is the pirate, the Ocean Rapiér," cried the African.

Captain Revello's face turned ashen in hue. That was his freebooter rival!

CHAPTER VI.

THE BUCCANEER.

"My God, Topaz! that is the brig known as the Ocean Rapiér, and it may be death to us to be picked up by her, instead of life," cried the Mexican captain.

"Yes, senor; it will not do to say you are Captain Revello."

"No, no indeed! I will not dare claim to be a Mexican officer. It was fortunate that I cast aside my uniform for a sailor's suit!"

"I will say I am—am—Don Ricardo Castile, a ranchero, dwelling upon the coast of Mexico, and with you, my slave, were bound to Vera Cruz, when our craft was wrecked."

"Yes, senor."

"Now get those togs of yours overboard, Topaz, for rancheros do not dress their slaves in velvet, silk and precious stones."

The African hastily drew off his strange and gorgeous costume which had but added to his ugly looks, and hastily cut out with his knife a canvas covering for his deformed body.

In the meanwhile the brig had drawn quite near, and a crowd of men were visible upon the bows gazing at the boat.

The brig was a very handsome craft—the counterpart in fact of the wrecked Mexican cruiser, Rattlesnake.

She came along at a swift pace, though the wind was light, and carried a heavy battery it could be seen and a large crew of as wild a looking lot of human beings as could be gathered together in the four quarters of the globe.

There was no flag at the peak to tell her nationality, if she had any, but the keen eyes of Topaz had detected in her a brig known as the Ocean Rapiér, and which was a pirate craft, a terror upon the Gulf and in the southern seas.

At last as the boat drew nearer the brig, Captain Revello broke the silence which had fallen between him and the negro since discovering the nature of the vessel that was to save them.

"Topaz."

"Yes, senor."

"That is the Rapiér?"

"Yes, chief."

"Her commander is Bertrando, a man merciless to all, as you know."

"Yes, senor."

"I have lost my vessel, and that one is her counterpart."

"She is a twin to the Rattlesnake, Senor Captain."

"A perfect twin, well armed, well manned, as you see, for she has a large crew on board, such as they are, and why will she not suit me?"

The African seemed fairly astonished at the bold question.

A man picked up in an open boat at sea suggested the idea of taking possession of an armed craft which he felt confident was a buccaneer surprised even the serene Topaz.

"The senor means to be captain?" he asked after a pause.

"That is just what I do mean, Topaz, for I believe it can be done, if I play my cards right, so keep yourself ready to aid me."

"I am ready to obey the senor," was the calm reply.

The bold thought he had given utterance to had brought the fire back to the eyes of Captain Revello and he gazed upon the brig with the look of a man already in command of her.

The brig was now but a short distance away and there came a hail in Spanish:

"Ho, the boat!"

"Ay, ay, Senor Captain!" answered Revello, calmly.

"Run under our lee as we luff, and board us!" came the gruff command.

"Ay, ay, sir," was the answer, and a minute after Captain Revello, followed by Topaz, went over the side of the brig.

The scene that met their gaze was a strange one, for there, grouped forward, were four-score men attired in red skull-caps and white duck pants, their bodies being naked and exposed to the weather, while they were also barefoot.

Their faces showed that they mostly came from the Gulf shores and South America, though there were a few Anglo-Saxons seen here and there amid the group, and also the red skin of an Indian and the sable complexion of a negro.

A motley, murderous-looking lot they certainly were, and each man wore in his belt a long-bladed, ugly-looking knife.

The decks and all about the vessel showed discipline however, and though weather-worn in hull, rig and sails, the craft was evidently kept in first-class trim, while the guns were shining bright and ready for use.

Many scars were visible in decks, bulwarks and rigging, and many more had been patched up, showing that whatever her calling the vessel had not escaped unscathed in her cruising.

Aft there stood a group of half a dozen officers and they were resplendent in gorgeous uniforms of black and silver, while upon the hat of each, as upon the skull-caps of the men, was embroidered a golden rapiér.

A young officer had met the Mexican and negro at the gangway, bade them cast off their boat and follow him.

They did so, Revello walking upright and presenting a commanding appearance, while Topaz shuffled along in his awkward gait.

There upon the quarter-deck stood a tall man, with long, jet-black beard and hair and the eye of an eagle.

"Well, senor, give an account of how it is I find you at sea in an open boat?" he said, in a stern tone, though with a certain air of respect.

"Allow me to introduce myself, Senor Captain, as a Mexican ranchero, by name Don Castile, who was wrecked upon his way to Vera Cruz, while all who escaped you see before you."

"Don Ricardo Castile?" repeated the captain of the brig, who had given a start when the name was spoken.

"Yes, senor."

"And you dwell in Mexico now, senor?"

"I do, Senor Captain."

"Cortez, have you ever heard the name of the senor as a Mexican ranchero?" and the commander of the brig turned to one of his officers.

"I have, senor, and he is a Spaniard of vast wealth, who many years ago came to Mexico and married there."

"It is said that he is one of the richest men in Mexico, and his home is somewhere within fifty leagues of Vera Cruz," was the answer of the officer addressed.

Revello did not show his uneasiness during this answer of the officer, but started when the brig's commander asked:

"Have you, Cortez, or any one else on this vessel, ever seen Don Ricardo Castile?"

"I have seen him, Senor Captain," an officer responded.

"And is this gentleman Don Castile, Senor Waldo?"

"Yes, Senor Captain," was the prompt reply.

"Then there can be no doubt about his identity."

"I am sorry, Senor Captain, that you deemed it necessary to cast a doubt upon my assertion as to who I am," haughtily said Revello.

"Pardon, senor, but I only wished to be sure, for I desired to know how sure I was of the large ransom I am to demand for your release, for permit me to present myself as Captain Bertrando, the Buccaneer," and the commander of the brig bowed with marked courtesy.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RECOGNITION.

CAPTAIN RUDOLPH REVELLO felt that he had made a mistake in claiming to be another person than himself.

He saw that for some reason he was doubted by the buccaneer captain, and he could not understand how it was that Officer Waldo had con-

fessed to seeing Don Castile and yet said that he was the ranchero, for they were not in the least degree alike to each other.

As for Topaz he stood in a listless way, as though life held no interest for him, and yet he noted every look, heard every word that was said.

"I will see the Senor Don Ricardo Castile in my cabin," said Captain Bertrando, with something very like sarcasm in his tone.

Revello bowed and followed him to the cabin, when a steward was called to bring food and wine.

This was dispatched with a relish that showed great hunger, and Bertrando the while was silent.

When he had finished his meal Bertrando turned and said:

"Now, Senor Don Ricardo, as you have satisfied the cravings of hunger I wish a talk with you."

"Certainly, senor," and the courage of the man arose now that his hunger was satisfied.

"I wish to know just where you were born in Spain, and in what year?"

Revello was the more convinced by this questioning that he had made a mistake; but he answered:

"I was born in the Villa Castile, Madrid, and I am thirty-six years of age."

"Ah! and your father was—"

"A colonel of cavalry in the Spanish Army, and slain in battle."

"I see; and you left Spain for Mexico for reasons?"

"Yes, senor, and I made Mexico my home."

"And married there?"

"Yes, senor."

"You not only brought a fortune with you to Mexico, but married a very rich Mexican lady I believe?"

"I have lost my riches, senor."

"Ah! that is bad; but I think, Don Ricardo Castile, that you can raise a sum to save your life."

"A small sum."

"I will demand as the ransom of a man of your wealth the sum of fifty thousand pesos."

"Ah, senor, you must take my life, for I am a poor man and could not pay one-tenth the sum you name."

"Your life it must be, then, Don Ricardo."

The Mexican winced at this and was silent.

He had in his belt a sum in precious stones and gold amounting to half the amount named by the buccaneer.

This he would naturally give up to save his life, and yet did the pirate know that he had the precious treasure with him, he would take it and still hold him for ransom.

If he had only not said that he was Don Ricardo, he would have been able to play the poor man.

But he had made the mistake and must abide by it.

"Well, Don Ricardo," and whenever the buccaneer spoke the name of the Spaniard, it was with a peculiar emphasis. "Well, Don Ricardo, I wish to say that I have intended visiting you in your home on the coast, well knowing I would get a rich haul by so doing."

"But fate has thrown you in my way, and to make you escape you must pay for it."

"I therefore give you your choice of being my pilot to your home, where you can pay me the sum demanded and save your life, or refuse, and you shall be made to walk the plank within the hour."

"Senor, I am not Don Ricardo Castile," suddenly said Revello, thus brought to bay by the pirate.

"My dear senor, let me tell you that I knew that from the first, for Don Ricardo and I were boys together, and I knew at once that you had lied to me."

"Senor!"

"Do not flash up at my words, for you certainly did not tell the truth, and this time I expect to have it."

"I am a poor Mexican sailor, senor, who could not pay you ransom were you to offer me my life for a thousand pesos."

"Is this the truth, senor?" and Bertrando sharply eyed his prisoner.

"It is, Senor Captain."

The buccaneer smiled, but made no reply.

Then he arose and left the cabin and Revello was alone.

He began to feel more and more his mistake and what the outcome would be he did not know.

He dared not confess to the buccaneer who he was in reality, for that would surely be the signal for his death.

At last Bertrando returned and thrusting himself into his former seat, he said:

"Now, senor, I wish you to tell me the truth."

"What would you know, Senor Captain?"

"Who and what are you?"

"I am, as I said, a Mexican sailor, the master of a coasting craft that was lost in the storm of ten days ago."

"And you and your African slave were the sole survivors, senor?"

"We were, Captain Bertrando."

"You are wrong again, senior."
 "How do you mean?"
 "I will allow another than myself to explain."
 So saying the buccaneer captain stepped to the companionway and called:
 "Senor Waldo!"
 "Ay, ay, Senor Captain," came the answer, and a moment after Officer Waldo appeared.
 The Mexican did not change countenance, for the eyes of Bertrando were upon him as he said:
 "Senor Waldo, you have met this gentleman before?"
 "I have, Captain Bertrando,"
 "You were pleased to recognize in him Don Ricardo Castile."
 "I did say that he was the Don, but for a purpose, senior."
 "Name your purpose to me?"
 "I know who he is and I intended to use the information later, when I saw you alone, Senor Captain."
 "It may be so, and it may not be; but admitting that it is, tell me now who this gentleman is?"
 The officer seemed a trifle anxious, and Revello felt, as well as did Bertrando, that he had not told the truth in regard to why he had made it appear that he was Don Ricardo Castile.
 "Senor Captain," began the officer, with the tone and manner of one who felt that he had a surprise to give:
 "I will now tell you who this gentleman is, and you will be glad indeed to know, as he is one whom you have often wished to meet."
 "Indeed! and who is he?" quickly asked the pirate.
 "Captain Rudolph Revello of the Mexican Navy, Senor Captain," was the response of the buccaneer lieutenant.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PIRATE'S ACCUSATION.

REVELLO started at the words of Waldo, for he knew now that he was recognized, that further attempt to conceal his identity was impossible.
 The buccaneer captain on his part sprung to his feet with an ejaculation of half-delight, half-anger.
 He turned his gaze earnestly upon the Mexican Officer and asked sternly:
 "Do you deny the charge of Senor Waldo, sir?"
 "I do not, Captain Bertrando."
 "I am Rudolph Revello, captain in the Mexican Navy," was the cool reply, for now that he had to face the ordeal the Mexican was wholly unmoved.
 "And how is it, senior, that I find you at sea in an open boat, with only a negro as a companion?"
 "My brig was wrecked in the tornado and driven upon a sunken reef, the African and I alone escaping."
 "You commanded the brig-of-war Rattlesnake?"
 "I did."
 "The sister ship of my own vessel?"
 "Yes, only a superior craft and fleetier."
 "You say well, and I wanted that craft."
 "Senor Waldo, I will excuse you now, and I thank you for the secret you have made known to me, though I cannot but feel you intended to keep your knowledge for some reason best known to yourself."
 Waldo made no reply, and thus dismissed, retired from the cabin.
 "Now, Senor Captain, we can talk together."
 Revello simply bowed, and Captain Bertrando continued:
 "I knew your vessel well, and I knew you as a Mexican officer who took advantage of the resemblance of your brig to mine, and the fact that I was a pirate, to commit acts of piracy upon the high seas which were laid at my door."
 "Senor, your words are insulting," sharply responded Revello.
 "Nevertheless, they are true, as I know well."
 "I am in your power, Senor Bertrando, and hence you can cast insults upon me with impunity."
 "Bah! don't put on a melo-dramatic air of injured innocence, Captain Revello, for I know what I am talking about."
 "You did rob vessels at sea under my flag, and how you kept your officers and crew true to you I can not understand, though you did do so."
 "I heard of a vessel that was robbed at sea by my brig, and her captain I sought for and found."
 "He told me that it was my brig, and more, that I was the man, for the captain of the vessel that boarded him wore a long beard and a uniform similar to mine."
 "This set me to thinking, and soon after another case came before my observation."
 "This time I was told the same thing by the crew of the craft overhauled on the high seas, that I was the man, my brig the one that captured their vessel, and that she carried the same battery; her crew were half stripped, and her flag was a red rapier."
 "Then I knew that my beautiful brig had a double, and that perhaps I did also."

"I began my search for the double of my vessel and myself, and to my surprise at last learned there was a Mexican cruiser which must be the craft."
 "You remember that we crossed the path of each other several times at sea, and each time, though it was your duty to hunt me down, as a cruiser should a buccaneer, you fled from me."
 "Perhaps you could have captured my craft, perhaps not; but certainly you would not try conclusions with me, and so fled from me."
 "It suited your purpose to do so, for you wanted me to remain a pirate at sea; you desired to have a counterpart of your brig cruising as an outlaw craft, for it gave you the chance you sought to live a double life, to enrich yourself as a secret buccaneer, while I, Bertrando, of the Ocean Rapier, got the name of all the piracies you were guilty of."
 "Now you can understand, Senor Rudolph Revello, why I have been anxious to overhaul your craft, why I have been so desirous of meeting you."
 "At last we do meet, and you play the part of a man I know but too well, and have also been anxious to find."
 "Senor, you are more than welcome on board my vessel, I assure you."
 There was too much of sarcasm in the last words of Bertrando to cause Captain Revello to feel that his welcome was genuine.
 He was glad to see him; yes, but it was because he had him in his power, and intended, for some reason known to himself, to use the power he held over him.
 Revello had listened to the pirate's charges in silence, his face unmoved.
 He uttered no contradiction, for that would be useless, he well knew.
 When at last Bertrando told him he was glad to see him on his vessel, he said in reply:
 "Senor Captain, I claim the rights due a shipwrecked man, wholly at your mercy."
 "You are a pirate, yes, and I am a captain in the Mexican service, and have been your foe, have sought to hunt you down for your piracies, as your charges against me are of no avail, you having mistaken my vessel for some other that has been playing a double game, doubtless one like yourself, a pirate."
 "I am not deceived in this matter, Captain Revello, for I know you to be the man who has robbed on the high seas under my name and flag, and thus led a dual existence."
 "Why, I know that you have even had the report of your outlawry sent to your Government, for I have been in Vera Cruz, pirate though I am, and I have heard much of you and your life there."
 "You have been an extravagant liver for a captain of the navy, but then you have had the results of your piracies to support you in your luxurious life."
 "I can still only deny the charge you make against me, and say that you have been deceived into believing that I have impersonated you and your vessel."
 The buccaneer laughed lightly and replied:
 "I am right, I know; but there is another thing I wish to speak to you about."
 "Well, senior?"
 "You know Don Ricardo Castile?"
 "I do."
 "What family has he?"
 "Himself and daughter are all."
 "Ahl! his wife is dead then?"
 "She is."
 "And he is very rich?"
 "He is said to be."
 "Well, Captain Revello, your life depends upon your doing as I tell you," and Bertrando looked very much in earnest as he uttered the words.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DEMAND.

"So I am to buy my life from you, Senor Captain Bertrando?" said Revello with a sneer, in answer to the remark of the buccaneer.
 "Yes, though not with gold, as I can hardly expect a shipwrecked man to possess much in the way of riches."
 "Then how am I to purchase my life, may I ask, if not with gold?"
 "By doing as I command you."
 "What is your wish?"
 "In the first place you pretended to be Don Ricardo Castile."
 "You now know me as I am."
 "True, and you are the friend of Don Ricardo, I take it?"
 "I am."
 "Doubtless of his fair daughter, too."
 "We will not discuss the seniorita."
 "Very well; let us talk of the Don."
 "What do you wish to know regarding him?"
 "Very little, for I know far more of Ricardo Castile than do you."
 "Indeed?" asked Revello, in surprise, struck by the manner of the man.
 "I do, as you will understand when I tell you that he is my brother!"
 "Your brother?" and Revello laughed in a derisive way.

"Yes, my brother; and though younger than I am, he holds my heritage and fortune to-day."
 "You still doubt, and yet, if you know him well, and will regard me closely, you will see many points of resemblance between us, for we were said to be much alike in the long ago."
 "I believe you do resemble him—yes, I am certain of it."
 "Did I cut off my long beard and hair, you would find at once how much we are alike."
 "And he is a gentleman to-day, a man honored and respected by all who know him, while you are—"
 "A pirate; yes, and he it was who made me what I am."
 "I wish to tell you that Ricardo and I loved the same maiden, and I trusted in his honor always, so asked him to see her often in my absence, for I was a sailor, an officer in the navy of Spain."
 "I left, with that maiden pledged to become my wife."
 "I returned sooner than I had expected, wounded in action and ill with fever, and I found them, the false maiden and the false brother, exchanging vows of love in the moonlight."
 "They did not see me, and I heard her tell him that she had never loved until he had taught her the sweet lesson, a lesson she could never learn from me."
 "Maddened at his perfidy, I leveled a pistol, which I had snatched from my belt, and fired at him."
 "Great God! they both fell, for the bullet struck him on the head, glanced downward and entered her false heart."
 "He was merely stunned, but I believed that I had killed both of them and fled."
 "Of course I became a Cain-accursed wanderer, an outcast, and disgraced as an officer, a deserter, I became an outlaw, and turned to piracy."
 "Well, I have been a pirate ever since, and you know well my record as such, for you have sought to emulate it."
 "I never knew until long after, that I had not killed both my brother and my false lady-love."
 "Then I found out the truth, of how my bullet had pierced her breast and only wounded my brother."
 "The influence of our father got Spanish law to make my brother the heir to the title and estates, and some years after my flight, Ricardo became the Don, when our father died, and sole heir to the vast fortune."
 "It was told me too how he had left Spain and sought a home in some South American country, yet I could never trace him."
 "Now you tell me that he has turned Mexican, married a lady of wealth in your country, and has a daughter."
 "This is so, is it not?"
 "It is."
 "And you know where he dwells?"
 The Mexican was silent, for he seemed to understand the drift of the buccaneer's question.
 "Answer me, Senor Revello."
 "What would you know?"
 "Do you know where the house of Don Ricardo Castile is?"
 "Why do you wish to know?"
 "Answer me!" was the stern rejoinder.
 "I do know where the home of Don Ricardo Castile is."
 "Then you are my man."
 "If you intend to wrong him, or harm him, I am not the man to betray his whereabouts to you."
 "Do you love life?"
 "I do."
 "Do you love the Don's daughter?"
 "That is my affair."
 "I am amused, for I know that you do."
 "Well?"
 "I do not think it would be right for me to allow my niece to wed a man, who under the guise of a man of honor is at heart a pirate."
 "I am falsely accused by you."
 "You are not, and I mean what I say when I ask if you love life?"
 "I have answered you."
 "Well, should you again set foot in Vera Cruz you would doubtless be given another ship and wed Don Ricardo Castile's daughter, thus securing a vast fortune."
 "Thus all would be well for you; but should you not do as I demand, then never will you set foot again in Vera Cruz and never will you wed Don Ricardo's daughter, for on the contrary you will dangle from the yard-arm of my brig, or walk the plank into the sea, loaded with chains."
 "Now, Captain Revello, it remains for you to say whether you wish to save your life or sacrifice it, for I am in deadly earnest."
 That he was in earnest the whole manner and tone of the buccaneer was proof, and Revello read as much.
 But he asked in an unmoved tone:
 "Well, what am I to do to save my life?"
 "You are to pilot my vessel to the home of Don Ricardo, for he lives upon the coast I am certain."
 "And what's your motive in going there?"
 The buccaneer was silent for a minute and then said:

"I desire to get the fortune that is mine by right, for the title of Don I do not care for, and Ricardo can have."

"The fortune he secured from his Mexican wife he can also retain, so he will not be left a pauper; but the Spanish inheritance is my heritage, and by the Heaven above I will have it *peso* for *peso* and a liberal interest on the amount up to date."

"Now, Captain Revello, you are to pilot my vessel to the nearest haven, to the Castile hacienda, and then guide me to the home and bring about a meeting between my brother and myself."

"He believes you dead."

"Hal you know this?" quickly cried the buccaneer.

"I know there is a shadow upon his life, for he once told me of a brother who had gone wrong and ended his life upon a pirate deck."

"He is mistaken, as you see and he will soon discover. Now, senior, come on deck and put the brig on a course for the Mexican Coast."

"I refuse."

"Then you shall die within the hour, Captain Revello," was the savage retort of the buccaneer Rover.

CHAPTER X.

BROUGHT TO TERMS.

REVELLO could not but note a similarity in the life of Bertrando the buccaneer and his own, as far as the act of the outlaw which had put to death the woman he had loved, and his own sacrifice of the one who had been his wife and dogged his steps for revenge.

He was even more guilty than was the buccaneer, for he had coolly doomed the unfortunate woman to die in chains, to go down with the wreck, while Bertrando had shot his false lady-love in a moment of sudden jealousy and rage at discovering how she had betrayed his trust in her.

Now he stood at the mercy of this same man, an acknowledged pirate, and the brother of Don Ricardo Castile.

Should he betray the home of the Spaniard and thus rob himself of the fortune that was to be the inheritance of the Don's daughter, whom he was determined to make his wife?

For the Don, Revello cared but little, if anything.

In truth, he would be only too glad to get the Don out of the way by death, so that the Senorita Marcelite would have the fortune in her own right, and that meant that he would control it.

But if the buccaneer discovered his brother, there was but little doubt he would force him to give up the fortune he had brought from Spain with him, and which was justly his own, outcast and outlaw though he was.

If Don Ricardo gave up the inheritance, then it robbed his daughter of her fortune, a half of it at least, and that was in Revello's eyes, robbing him.

So he decided, as these thoughts flashed through his mind, to try and make terms with the pirate captain.

If he could not do this, then he would see if he could not entrap him, and this Revello was most anxious to do.

"So you demand that I pilot you to the home of Don Ricardo Castile, Senor Bertrando, or, refusing, lose my life?" he said, when he had decided what he would do.

"You understand exactly the situation, I am glad to see," said the buccaneer in response.

"And should I do this, what then?"

"Your life shall be spared."

"And is that all?"

"It is granting much to a foe, for you have been my foe, though you did not seek my destruction or to drive me from the sea."

"Captain Bertrando, I have a confession to make to you."

"Well, senior, I am most willing to hear it."

"I desire to tell you that I love the Senorita Marcelite."

"Marcelite! Great God! does the daughter of Ricardo Castile bear the name of Marcelite?" cried Bertrando excitedly.

"She does, senior."

"It was her name, the name of the woman who was false to me, whom I killed," groaned the pirate, and Revello saw that he was very deeply moved.

"Such is the Senorita Castile's Christian name, Senor Bertrando," repeated Revello.

"Well, he has named her after that false one."

"So be it, I shall hate her because I hate the memory of the false Marcelite."

"But you love the maiden, this Marcelite, you said, Senor Captain?"

"I do, senior, with all my heart and soul."

"And she returns this love, this Marcelite?"

"She does, senior."

"She will be as false as her fair namesake," said the buccaneer with a sneer.

"Never! she will never be false to me."

The buccaneer laughed in a bitter way, while he answered:

"It runs in the blood, Senor Mexican."

"Her father was false to me, his brother; her namesake was false to me, and mark my words, Marcelite Castile will be doubly false to you."

"I will not hear you thus cast slurs upon her honor, for—"

"How can you prevent, senior, for you are powerless here to resent even a blow."

"But we will not quarrel about her, for she is not worth it, being his child and named after the false Marcelite."

"Now to continue what you were pleased to call your confession?"

"Well, as I told you, I love the Senorita Marcelite, and she is pledged to become my bride."

"Yes."

"You wish me to pilot you to the home of the Don, to rob him of his fortune?"

"You are mistaken. I am merely going to take back that which is my own."

"His Spanish fortune is even greater than that which he received from his Mexican wife."

"Indeed! then he is a rich man; a very rich man, as I know well what my inheritance was to have been."

"I shall have to make a still greater demand upon my dear brother, now that I know he is so wealthy."

"I thank you for telling me this, Senor Revello."

The Mexican bit his lips at what he had said, but soon resumed:

"Now you demand that I aid you to rob the Don, and in doing so I rob myself, for of course the Senorita Marcelite would inherit all her father's riches, being his only heir."

"That is the situation, my dear senior."

"In return, you offer me my life, not even pledging me my freedom."

"What more can you expect from a monster such as I am said to be?"

"I do expect more, and I shall demand it."

"Demand?"

"So I said."

"This to me?"

"You understand my words, Senor Pirate. I said I would demand more."

"And you are my prisoner?"

"Yes, so become by accident, by the force of circumstances I could not control, and of which you have taken advantage."

"Granted; but now to your demand?"

"To pilot you to the home of Don Ricardo is to rob myself, and I will not do so unless I get my terms."

"You will die if you refuse."

"So be it."

"I shall have you loaded with chains and force you to walk the plank to your death."

"So be it!"

"Or I will swing you up to die at the yard-arm."

"There is but one death, Bertrando, one time to die, and I will face it like a man, as I have done many a time before."

"We shall see."

"Put me to the test, then, and end it."

Bertrando uttered an oath between his shut teeth. That he had caught a Tartar he discovered, and he was surprised to find a man in his power demanding terms.

That he could frighten him into doing as he demanded he believed was impossible, once he looked into the determined defiant face of his prisoner.

He felt that Revello would rather die than lead the life of a poor man, to be bereft of a fortune he regarded as his own through Marcelite Castile.

So he was brought to terms by the bold stand of the Mexican and asked in his sneering way:

"What is your demand, Captain Revello?"

"That you make me first officer under you of your pirate brig—such are my terms, Senor Bertrando!" was the startling response of the Mexican captain.

CHAPTER XI.

THE COMPACT.

CAPTAIN BERTRANDO felt that he had met his match.

Here was a man, taken out of a boat adrift at sea, knowing that he was Bertrando the buccaneer and wholly at his mercy, and yet making terms with him, forcing him into a compact which he saw no way of escaping from.

He looked at Revello with a glance of unbounded admiration, and at last, when he had recovered from his surprise, asked:

"Do you mean it, Captain Revello?"

"I do."

"You are a commissioned officer of the Navy of Mexico?"

"Yes, but without a vessel."

"Yet you wish to turn pirate?"

"I do."

"You have a motive?"

"Yes."

"Am I to know it?"

"If I returned to Vera Cruz the Junta would not give me a vessel, for the Government is too poor to build me one."

"The brig I have lost was my own property, built at my expense, and so armed and equipped, hence I was made her captain."

"Now I have lost my all in the brig and could not build another vessel."

"Her loss will soon be known and I will be supposed to have gone down in her."

"Of course the Senorita Marcelite will mourn for me, and even if compelled to wed another it will not be for a year or two, for she is still very young."

"I see, senior."

"Now, as senior lieutenant on your vessel, I am entitled to share next to you in all spoils."

"I understand."

"Thus the fortune you get from Don Ricardo will in part return to me as my share of the plunder, for the crew shall not be cheated out of their portion of the plunder simply because you do not get the money at the cannon's mouth."

"You are a bold man, Senor Revello, to talk to me thus."

"I have never been accused, even by my enemies, of being a coward, senior; but to my story."

"I am listening."

"Thus, as senior officer of your vessel, I come in for my share of the plunder now on hand, and what you will secure from piracies in the future."

"At the end of a certain time, which we will agree upon between us, I will disappear, supposed to be dead in fact, and I will reappear in Vera Cruz and wed the Senorita Marcelite, stating that I have been a prisoner of pirates, of yourself in fact, who picked me up at sea after my vessel was shipwrecked, and I was only able to make my escape after desperate dangers and untold sufferings."

"I understand, senior."

"And then?"

"Why, I will get my share of what Don Castile has left by marrying his daughter, and if you feel revengeful toward your brother and wish to remove him from life in some way, say by a raid upon his hacienda and killing him, you will greatly oblige me, Senor Bertrando, and receive my heartfelt thanks."

"Now what do you say, senior, to such a compact between us?"

Bertrando regarded Captain Revello with a look of positive admiration, as one man will regard another for whom he has the highest respect and who has just done some heroic act.

"What have I to say, senior?" he asked with enthusiasm.

"Yes, Bertrando," was the cool reply.

"Why I wish to say just this, that you are a far greater villain than I am, and that is saying a very great deal, my dear Revello, for I am a very bad man."

"I feel flattered at such praise from you, Senor Bertrando."

"But you do not answer my question."

"Put it straight now, just what you wish?"

"To become your first officer for one year, or more, and then be allowed to disappear."

"I see."

"In return for which I am to pilot you to the home of Don Ricardo Castile, whose Spanish fortune you are to demand and receive from him, leaving the balance for his daughter, whom I am to marry in good time, and then you are to render her fatherless, thus gaining your own revenge against your brother."

"I understand, senior."

"And agree to the compact?"

"There is a slight obstacle in the way?"

"What is it?"

"A man."

"Yourself?"

"No."

"Who, then?"

"The officer whose shoes you wish to step into."

"I do not care for that."

"He is a dangerous man, a very dangerous man, senior, and there is no better swordsman the world over than is Officer Cortez."

"I will meet him in the *duello*, and thus settle the question."

"Upon what plea will you meet him?"

"Tell him that if I can get the better of him my life is to be spared, and I am to step into his place."

"If he has courage he will be willing to meet me, and defend his place."

"The Senor Cortez is not a man to refuse, Senor Revello."

"And you agree to the compact, I am to understand?" eagerly said Revello.

"I have not so said, senior."

"I must have time to consider, and so will give you an answer upon the morrow, you mean while being my guest."

"I will now order the brig put away for the Mexican Coast, in case I should decide to do as you suggest, we will lose no time."

"Can you tell me about the course I am to head to bring me near Don Ricardo's home?"

"I will not say a word more, senior, upon the subject, until I know your decision."

"Very well, and remember if I do not agree to the compact, death shall be the penalty you are to suffer, unless you agree to my terms, which are to pilot me to the home of my traitor brother?"

"I understand, Captain Bertrando, and you have my answer now that I will not pilot you to

your brother's home, except upon my own terms, which you know, so you can put me to death the moment you decide against me, and by any means you seem pleased to see me die, for I shall meet my fate like a brave man, wicked one though I be."

Captain Bertrando recognized fully that he had more than met his match, and so he rose and left the cabin with an impatient imprecation.

His first duty was to call Senor Waldo and ask him if he knew where on the coast was the home of Don Ricardo.

But this Waldo did not know, though he had heard that the rich Spaniard dwelt not very many leagues from Vera Cruz.

With this answer Bertrando ordered the brig headed for Vera Cruz, and then he sought Officer Cortez and had a talk with him of some minutes.

The face of the Spaniard brightened as his chief talked with him, and at last he said:

"I will gladly meet him, Senor Captain, and kill him, too."

"Very well, Senor Cortez, it shall be upon the morrow," was Bertrando's response, and descending to the cabin once more he found Captain Revello serenely sleeping upon a divan.

But he awoke at the call of the chief, who said:

"Captain Revello, I have decided to agree to your terms—they shall be as a compact between us."

CHAPTER XII.

THE DUEL WITH RAPIERS.

THE face of Revello did not change color even at the words of the buccaneer chief, which told him that he was to have his way in the terms he offered.

He had decided upon a plot of his own to win all, losing nothing, and he intended to play the game boldly and to the end, making no mistake.

"I am glad that you have decided to accept my terms, Chief Bertrando, and I suppose this decision includes a duel with Senor Cortez?"

"Yes, after we have reached the hacienda of Don Ricardo."

"It must be before, senor, for if I make a single move it is only as first officer of your vessel."

This did not please Bertrando.

He well knew the desperate nature of his officer, Cortez, his love of taking human life, and his wonderful swordsmanship.

He supposed that there could be but one end to the duel, the death of Revello, and this would prevent his finding the home of Don Ricardo.

So he replied:

"I have yielded to your terms, Senor Captain, and can do no more."

"Then you may as well get your rope ready, or your chains, for either a yard-arm hanging, or walking the plank, for I shall do nothing, I pledge you my word, Captain Bertrando, except as lieutenant of your vessel."

Bertrando saw that the man was in earnest, or he so believed, and hence he went on deck to have a talk with his lieutenant.

"The prisoner is firm in his resolve, Cortez, not to guide us to the hacienda of Don Ricardo, except he be an officer of this vessel."

"He believes he can kill you and step into your shoes, as I told you, which, of course, he cannot do."

"No, Senor Captain, I shall kill him."

"But that is just what you must not do."

"Ah, Captain Bertrando, and why not?"

"If you kill him, then we cannot find the hacienda, see?"

"True, senor."

"Disarm him, and he will have had his trial for your place, and be willing to try the next officer in rank, for the one he kills he steps into his shoes, do you understand?"

"Yes, Senor Captain, I am to disarm him, to lower his pride, to draw a little blood, so that he can feel the prick of my sword point, but not to harm him materially."

"That is just it, Cortez."

"I understand, Senor Captain, and am wholly at your command and the stranger's," and the Spaniard showed that he felt no fear of the result.

"He was a large, powerfully built man, with a face that was brutish in its cruelty, and no one had ever known him to be merciful in a combat."

Captain Bertrando felt satisfied that he could depend upon his lieutenant, under the circumstances, of knowing that the death of the prisoner meant a loss in gold to the pirate crew, and Cortez was a great lover of the precious metal.

So he returned to the cabin, and told Captain Revello that the combat was arranged for the following morning, and to get himself in the best trim possible.

"I will do so, Senor Captain, if I may be allowed to have my slave, Topaz, come here to the cabin to give me exercise, for my being cramped for days in a small boat has stiffened up my sinews."

Topaz was sent for, and he and his captain exchanged a few passes with rapiers, for the

black was a fine swordsman, and often gave his master a bout with the blades.

Captain Bertrando looked on with interest, and remarked, as he noted the Mexican's play:

"You handle a rapier well, senor."

"I have had much practice with blades," was the reply.

Later in the day another bout was had with the rapiers, between Revello and Topaz, and into the hands of the latter the Mexican managed to slip a piece of paper upon which he had written a few lines, for among the other accomplishments of the negro were reading and writing.

The words written were:

"I am to make a fight for the berth of first officer of this brig."

"Keep your eyes on me to obey all orders, and act promptly."

The night passed away without incident, the brig running swiftly along toward the Mexican Coast.

The morning dawned and the arrangements were made for the duel, the men being mustered to witness it.

The crew naturally supposed that the duel was simply a more merciful manner their chief had determined upon of getting rid of the prisoner, for that any man could face their desperate lieutenant and survive they had not the remotest idea.

At last Revello appeared on deck with Captain Bertrando, and Topaz followed bearing his rapier, a weapon loaned him by the chief.

Cortez was already there, his rapier strapped on and his manner indicative of the utmost indifference.

In a few words the chief told his officers and crew that the prisoner held a secret of value to them, and which he would only make known on condition that he was made senior lieutenant of the brig, a high position being held by Senor Cortez, to gain it the stranger could only do so by killing the officer named.

Cortez still seemed indifferent, except that there was an ugly look in his eyes which, seeing Bertrando gave him a warning to remember that he was to disarm the Mexican, not kill him.

"I understand, Senor Captain."

"I will not destroy the secret by taking his life," was the answer.

Excepting Waldo, who had been sworn to secrecy, not another person on the pirate brig knew Revello as he was.

He presented a striking contrast to the buccaneer lieutenant when he came on deck, for he was tall, elegant in form and courtly in manner, with a face that was handsome and winning.

"Senors, are you ready?" asked Captain Bertrando, and the two men faced each other, saluted Revello in a graceful way, Cortez in a gruff manner, and the blades crossed.

It took only a few passes to show all that the Mexican was not a bad swordsman, and a few more convinced the crew that their desperate lieutenant had met his match at last.

Cortez himself was most quick to realize this and rendered furious by the knowledge, he forgot the warning of his captain and set to work to kill the Mexican.

Then followed some magnificent work on the part of both men, the buccaneer black with rage, the Mexican cool and skillful, until suddenly the guard of the outlaw was struck up and the keen blade of Revello was driven into his heart.

CHAPTER XIII.

A BUCCANEER IN EARNEST.

No one was more amazed to see the blade of Senor Cortez drop from his lifeless hand than was Captain Bertrando, the buccaneer.

It meant that Cortez had at last met his superior, his master, and when he dropped to the deck a dead man, his last word being an oath, all were horrified, even on that vessel, where death so often held high carnival.

Every eye now turned upon the tall form of the stranger, as he stood resting his hands gracefully upon the hilt of his rapier, and gazing down at his victim with a look of calm indifference.

Then it was recalled that Topaz the African had not shown the slightest uneasiness in regard to his master's duel with the buccaneer lieutenant, seemingly conscious of his master's skill as a swordsman.

At last Captain Bertrando spoke, and he held out his hand to the victor.

"Senor, allow me to congratulate you upon your victory."

"You are a wonderful swordsman to get the better of the Senor Cortez; but having done so, you have the right to be his heir to the berth of first officer of this brig, to his belongings and all."

"Unless some officer may object?" and Revello cast his eyes over the group of assembled officers.

There were brave men among them, but there was not one, with the example before their eyes in the dead lieutenant, who was willing to dis-

pute the claim of Revello for first place at the head of the buccaneer officers, and hence all were silent.

"It seems that no one cares to dispute the claim with you, senor," said Bertrando.

"Not even Senor Waldo?" and there was a challenge in the tone and manner of Revello as he addressed that officer.

For some reason he wished to cross swords with the Senor Waldo, that was very evident.

The face of Waldo flushed, but he responded quickly:

"I have no quarrel with the senor, and congratulate him upon having won the berth which he sought."

Revello bowed and smiled; but the smile failed to provoke another reply from Senor Waldo and Captain Bertrando said:

"Now, senor, may I ask if you care to assume your duties as first officer of this brig at once?"

"I do, Senor Captain, and will put the brig on her course for the nearest haven to the hacienda of Don Ricardo Castile."

This pleased Bertrando and turning to his officers and crew he bade them obey Senor Revello as next to himself in command of the brig.

A cheer was given by the men to their new officer, for they admired his pluck, the body of the dead buccaneer lieutenant was stripped of its revolvers, sewn in a hammock and tossed into the sea without ceremony, and Revello took the deck when eight bells struck as officer of the watch.

A grim smile rested upon his face as he put the brig on the course he wished, and paced to and fro, congratulating himself inwardly upon his good luck.

"A poor wrecked devil twenty-four hours ago, and now second in command of a fine armed vessel, pirate though she be," he mused.

"Well, it is for me to use the means at my command to carve out my own destiny as suits my will and pleasure."

"To the hacienda of Don Ricardo we must go; but then—ah yes, and then—"

He did not finish his musings, but turned to the management of the vessel, sending the men to work in a way that showed he knew his duties and was a thorough and strict disciplinarian.

When he retired from his watch he sought the state-room of the man he had killed, and looked over all he found there with a coolness that showed he had an eye to profit from the death of Cortez as much as lay in his power to do so.

He soon discovered that Cortez had been very miserly, saving up a very snug sum in gold and precious stones, all of which fell to him as Captain Bertrando had said, the heir of the dead pirate.

And right here did Revello show his cunning, which it would have been well for Bertrando had he penetrated through, for he carried on deck two thirds of the savings of Senor Cortez, pretending that he gave all, and distributed them among the crew.

This at once won him favor with the men who were already prepossessed in his favor from the fact that they had picked him up at sea and this held great weight in their superstitious minds.

Then too his killing their officer, before supposed to be without an equal, had made him a hero in their eyes, while his generosity won them completely over, as he intended it should, for Revello was scheming to have things all his own way in good time.

Captain Bertrando also seemed to have taken a fancy to his new officer and sought his company, while he invited him to take his meals in the cabin with him, an honor he had bestowed upon no one else in his sea life.

This invitation was promptly accepted and Revello had the opportunity to enlarge upon the virtues of Topaz as a cook and servant, the result of which was that the African was at once installed as the servant of the buccaneer captain, replacing, as his master had done, the man who had occupied that position.

It was the third day after the duel between Cortez and Revello, that land was sighted, and the brig was headed for a high point that rose above the surrounding country.

"The home of Senor Don Ricardo is under the shadow of yonder hill, Captain Bertrando, and a league inland, while we can find a haven in a lagoon to the left yonder where the shores are heavily wooded," explained Revello.

"You know the force of the Don, senor?"

"Yes, he has too large a number of servants, and his hacienda is too strongly walled for even your crew to carry it by storm, so you must use strategy."

"What would you suggest?"

"You desire to see the Don personally?"

"Certainly, for in that way only can I get him to give up the inheritance that is mine?"

"True, senor, and so I would advise that you go in disguise by night, and I will accompany you also disguised, and you can see and have a talk with the Don."

"You can lead him to believe, if he declines your demand, that your men have his place surrounded and at their mercy, and thus force him to yield to his wishes; but of course I must remain unknown in this affair, senor, as my plan

is for the future, to wed his beautiful daughter."

"This is the very plan, Senor Revello, and I will do as you suggest," eagerly said the buccaneer chief.

CHAPTER XIV.

UNDER SUSPICION.

"SENOR, may I have a word with you?"

The one who asked the question was Waldo the second lieutenant of the brig, and he addressed his captain.

"Well, Waldo, what is it?" asked Bertrando somewhat impatiently.

"I believe, senor, that you know I look to your interest?"

"Yes, along with your own; but what then?"

"I only wish to offer a warning, senor."

"A warning?"

"Yes, Captain Bertrando."

"Of whom?"

"The man who was picked up at sea, sir, in an open boat, and who is now next in command of the brig to you."

"You are jealous, Waldo."

"No, senor, I am only watchful."

"Well, what have you discovered?"

"I have seen Revello become second in command to you, sir, showing his superiority over Cortez by killing him."

"Well?"

"Then he gave the effects of Cortez to the crew, and thus gained their good will."

"I see."

"His next move for power was to get that terrible African of his into your cabin as cook and servant."

"The black is harmless."

"Harmless, Senor Captain?"

"Yes, and as gentle as a lamb."

"He is as ferocious as a tiger, senor, and a perfect giant."

"Bah!"

"He has already thrashed half the crew, and not two hours ago mastered a number of them who sprung upon him."

"Can he be so terrible as you say, Waldo?"

"I only wish you could see him in a fight, captain, for he is a terror, and the men will let him alone in future; but I tell you what I do to warn you that your life alone is between the captain of this ship and Senor Revello."

"Ah! and you suspect him of being a traitor?"

"Why should he not be, senor, for he is a regular officer of the Mexican Navy, and by the capture of your vessel could win unbounded fame."

"He has lost his vessel and by taking yours into port as a prize could more than square the loss."

"Then, too, he would fall heir to the treasure you have on board, while he would prevent you from getting from Don Ricardo the fortune you hope for, thus saving all for himself as the husband of Senorita Castile."

"By Heaven, Waldo, but you are making a very clever case against this new lieutenant of mine," excitedly said the buccaneer captain.

"It is all for your sake, senor, because I do not wish to see you destroyed by him."

"Well, you have set me to thinking, Senor Waldo."

"I am glad of it, Captain Bertrando, for I have been thinking a great deal ever since I have seen Senor Revello come on board this vessel."

"I know what passed between you, as you are aware, and he knows that I have recognized him as commander of the Mexican brig-of-war Rattlesnake."

"You remember that he sought to put me out of the way, as he did Cortez, right after the duel, and this was because I knew him as he was."

"I begin to believe you are half right after all, Waldo."

"I am wholly right, senor, and all I ask of you is to be on your guard, trust him not and do not place yourself in his power."

"This is a terrible warning, Senor Waldo, and I thank you for it, as I intended this very night to go with him to the hacienda of Don Ricardo."

"Not alone, surely, Senor Captain?"

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That one was Topaz, who had seen them walk away together, and having his suspicions aroused against Senor Waldo, by his constant watching of him and his master, had glided to the caboose, and throwing himself down as though asleep had heard all that was said.

The moment that the buccaneer captain and Waldo had walked away, Topaz arose and soon after entered the cabin to prepare the table for dinner.

He made sure that no one was watching him, and standing by the open state-room door of Revello, quickly told him just what had been said, after which he glided away and went on with his duties.

"Forewarned is forearmed," muttered Captain Revello.

"I have suspected Waldo all along, and now I must make sure that he does no mischief."

"Let me think what is best to be done."

Half an hour after, when Captain Bertrando descended to the cabin for dinner, he found Senor Revello apparently asleep on a divan and aroused him.

"Well, Revello, the land is rising rapidly and we will be well in by sunset."

"Yes, captain, and I have been thinking that you had best take quite a large force with you on the march inland to the hacienda, instead, as we decided, a small one."

"Why do you think so?"

"Well, senor, should the Don decide to resist your demands by calling upon his servants to arrest you, then you would be at his mercy, unless you had a force large enough within call to rescue."

"You are right there, I believe."

"And perhaps, senor, it would be best not to take Topaz in with us, but to leave him outside the gates, prepared upon hearing a signal we can agree upon, to call up the reserve under Lieutenant Waldo."

"Why do you suggest Waldo, Senor Revello?"

"You will pardon me, Senor Captain, if I wrong Senor Waldo in your eyes, but he is jealous of my position over him, and with Cortez out of the way, has ambitions, I feel certain."

"If left on board the brig in command, he might be tempted to turn captain himself, and you know he is very popular with the men."

"Yes, I do know that he is," said Bertrando, and he began to feel a very uncomfortable suspicion against his second officer.

"I should feel sorry to wrong Waldo, Captain Bertrando, but then I fear he is not the friend to you that you believe him, for I, a stranger, have discovered that," said the cunning Revello, and he saw that his shot against Waldo had hit the mark, as Captain Bertrando said:

"Yes, Waldo shall go with us."

CHAPTER XV.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

HAVING excited the suspicion of Captain Bertrando against Waldo, Revello determined to make the best of it.

He had already decided upon his plan of operations, and had been able to give into the hands of Topaz a slip of paper, upon which was written a few words of instructions.

He had noticed which were the men who seemed to be most friendly to the second officer, Waldo, and he was determined that all of these should go on the expedition ashore, and so had said:

"Senor Waldo, Captain Revello has decided to take two score men ashore with him to-night, so pick out those you deem the best, as you know them well, and you are to command them."

As Revello had supposed he would do, Waldo at once selected his favorites, and reported his men ready when needed.

The brig had gotten within a league of the shore when the sun set and the distant walls of the hacienda of Don Ricardo were plainly visible with the glass, located as it was upon the side of a wooded hill.

At the peak of the brig, for fear a glass might be turned upon her, floated the Mexican flag, and Revello had remarked to Captain Bertrando that the vessel would be taken for the Mexican cruiser Rattlesnake, if seen by the people of the hacienda.

Standing by the side of the helmsmen, Revello directed them how to steer, and the brig glided slowly inshore, shortening sail as she went.

At last she entered the mouth of a lagoon, where Revello had often anchored his own vessel before, and the anchor was let fall.

Then Captain Bertrando and Revello went over the side of the brig into the waiting boats, the Mexican thoroughly disguised by a false beard, and both wearing the uniform of the Mexican Navy.

Waldo was already in the boats with his men, and Topaz had taken his place in the bow of the captain's cutter.

Revello led the way when a landing was made, and after a march inland of nearly a league, he halted the men in a timber motte not very far from the hacienda.

Lights were visible in the house, and on went

Captain Bertrando, Revello and Topaz, a signal having been agreed upon with Waldo to come if needed, when the African should give the call.

Captain Bertrando was suspicious now of both his officers as well as Topaz, and he was somewhat nervous in manner, having almost regretted the undertaking.

But the rich harvest he was to reap, if successful, urged him to go on, and he merely determined to watch Revello and be on his guard against any danger that might unexpectedly turn up.

Of course, if not suspected of treachery by those at the hacienda, and if neither Revello, Topaz or Waldo proved traitors, then there would be no danger, and all would be well with him.

Approaching the hacienda gates, in the solid adobe wall, Revello knocked loudly, and a voice soon asked who was there.

"Captain Revello, of the Mexican brig-of-war Rattlesnake," was the reply.

There was an exclamation of pleasure at once heard, for Revello was a liberal friend to the servants of the Don, and the gate was at once opened.

The man started back at seeing strangers, but Revello said:

"We come with messages from Captain Revello to Don Ricardo, so pray say to him that two officers of the brig desire an interview with him."

Thus reassured, and furthermore by a gold piece dropped into his hand, the gatekeeper departed, and very soon after returned, to usher the officers into the presence of the Don.

Don Ricardo Castile was a man of fine presence, but wearing a look of settled sadness, though his manners were cordial and winning.

He looked like one who carried a shadow in his heart, though he tried to hide the fact from others.

He was seated in his pleasant sitting-room, a decanter of wine on the table near him, along with a basket of fruit and some sweetmeats, but arose when the officers were ushered into his presence.

On account of his disguise Revello was desirous that Captain Bertrando should be the spokesman, and in fact he was anxious to see just what the intention of the buccaneer chief was.

"Senors, I welcome you. I saw, as I believed, Captain Revello's brig off-shore at sunset, so expected a visit from him. I hope no harm has befallen him!"

"Yes, Don Ricardo, the Senor Captain Revello has been wounded, and he is anxious to see both you and your daughter on board his vessel, and we are to escort you there," announced Captain Bertrando, glad of a chance to entrap the Don on board the brig.

At his words Revello started, for to have put both Don Ricardo and his daughter in the power of Bertrando was not what he wished by any means.

He saw that the cunning pirate had so plotted, and had taken quick advantage of the chance to entrap them.

This was not according to his wishes, or intentions, and he saw that he must act quickly, and with boldness, for Don Ricardo said at once:

"My dear senors, I am pained to learn the sad news you are the bearers of, and I fear, as Captain Revello also requests the presence of my daughter on board his vessel, that his condition is more serious than you care to make known."

"It is most serious, Don Ricardo, in fact I may say that the captain is desperately wounded and so begs that the Senorita Marcelite will accompany you."

And this was a clever ruse then of Captain Bertrando, to get the Don and Marcelite also into his power, thought Revello.

He was being used for this purpose, and once it was successful what would the buccaneer care for him?

He would break faith with him and perhaps visit upon the Don and his daughter the direst vengeance.

This would never do, for then the Don, Marcelite and Revello himself would be at the mercy of the pirate chief.

It had been the intention of Revello to allow the buccaneer chief to disclose to Don Ricardo who he was, and demand of him his inheritance.

That the high sense of honor of Don Ricardo would make him give up that which belonged to his brother, pirate though he was, Revello felt sure, and with this treasure on board the brig, then the Mexican intended to plot the capture of the vessel and thus win undying fame for himself.

Should they fail to get the Don's gold, then Revello, determined to have money at all costs, intended to get rid of the buccaneer chief through the agency of Topaz so as to cast no suspicion upon himself, and being then commander of the vessel to cruise the seas for plunder until he deemed fit to turn up and claim the Senorita Marcelite as his bride.

But this bold stand taken by Bertrando toward the Don would overthrow his own plot, he saw at a glance.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PLOTTERS.

It had seemed to Revello that he must win his game, either to thwart Captain Bertrando the Buccaneer or capture him.

He was a man who believed in luck, and always played a bold hand to have it go his way. He could not believe that he had escaped death in the wreck, and then starvation in the life-boat, as well as being killed by the desperate Cortez, to be worsted in his plot to have all go his way now.

Bertrando knew well the surprise his words must be to Revello, but did not even glance at him.

He felt that he had the Mexican pinioned down as it were, from any chance to move against him.

Could he get his brother, the Don, and his daughter aboard of his vessel, and at his mercy, then there would be no doubt of his getting his gold and his revenge as well, for he still felt the deepest hatred for the man who had caused him to slay the woman he loved, and who had won her from him, as he believed had been the case.

But Revello had decided upon what he should do, and what he did he did promptly.

Suddenly the buccaneer chief felt the cold muzzle of a pistol against the back of his head, and heard the words sternly uttered:

"Captain Bertrando, move and you are a dead man."

"Don Ricardo, this man is Bertrando the Buccaneer, and I will leave him to your keeping until I return for him."

"Quickly, call your servants!"

The surprise of Bertrando was as great as that of Don Ricardo.

He had been cleverly outwitted, and he knew that he would be shot down did he offer any resistance.

He caught at one ray of hope, the fact that he would be left to the keeping of his brother, the Don, by the man who had so boldly made him a prisoner.

He did not move, he did not even speak, and the Don, quickly recovering his composure, obeyed the stern command of Revello to disarm his prisoner.

He stepped forward and removed his pistols from his belt and his sword, though his surprise was great at the change in the situation of affairs.

"I thank you, Don Ricardo, and will now ask you to call your servants and secure this man, who is, as I said to you, none other than Bertrando, the Buccaneer, come here to rob you and to seek revenge."

"Hold him a prisoner here until you can send him to Vera Cruz, if I do not return for him."

The Don called for aid and several servants rushed in just as Captain Bertrando was able to speak after his amazement, and cry out:

"It is false! I am not Bertrando, the Buccaneer."

"Upon my life he is, Don Ricardo, and a band of his men are now outside your hacienda, so call your servants to be ready to resist an attack, should one be made, though do not let it be known that you are prepared for them."

"Here, men, seize that man and put him in irons!"

The servants who had entered gazed at their master and at the stranger who gave them the order, undecided as to whether to obey or not.

"Do as the senor commands you," said the Don, feeling that if the charge was true it would be safer by far to have the man in irons.

At once Bertrando, now wholly disarmed and at the mercy of his captors, was securely ironed, his bitter denunciation of Revello and his savage oaths appalling those about him.

"Now, Senor Don Ricardo, I leave this prisoner in your keeping until I return for him."

"Do not allow him a chance to escape, and await my coming, be it when it may," said Revello.

"But, senor, who, may I ask, are you?" said the Don, something about the man seeming familiar, though in disguise, he could not recognize him.

"You shall know in good season, Don Ricardo, who I am; but now there is a work for me to do and I must depart."

"Place your servants quietly on post to resist attack, and if none occurs, arouse the country on the morrow and hunt down the strangers you find upon your shores, for they are followers of this man."

"I am not Bertrando, Don Ricardo, for that man speaks falsely," now cried Bertrando, determined to make a bold effort to escape.

He saw that Don Ricardo was puzzled, and he continued:

"That man's charge has astounded me so that I could not find words to defend myself against his vile charges, for he, not I, is Bertrando the Buccaneer!"

"Ha! can this be true?" cried the astonished Don.

In an instant Revello saw that he must continue to play a bold game to win.

He did not wish to make himself known to the Don, but he saw no other course.

There were a score of servants now in the

room, and standing in the doorway, alarmed and amazed, was Marcelite Castile, called to the scene by the loud voices she had heard.

Springing to the side of Don Ricardo, Revello said in a low tone, and speaking rapidly:

"It is as I have said, Don Ricardo; that man is Bertrando the Buccaneer."

"You must trust me in this, senor."

"He speaks falsely, Don Ricardo! Do not put faith in him, for he seeks only to escape now," cried Bertrando, catching the low words uttered by Revello.

The Don was undecided which to believe, and stood like a dazed man.

The two officers of the Mexican brig-of-war, as he had believed, at first seemingly friends, had so suddenly become foes, and made such bitter charges, the one against the other, that he knew not which to believe, or what.

Thus he stood, undecided, and Revello saw that he could only triumph by making a still bolder stroke.

He had hoped to have it believed that he was lost with his vessel, when her loss should become known, until he saw fit to return and make his escape known.

He now saw that he must tell who he was to win the day, and yet he did not wish Marcelite to know him, or the servants either.

So he said in the same low tone in which he had before spoken:

"Don Ricardo, what I tell you of this man is true, for he is Bertrando the Buccaneer, and he came here to rob you, to get you and your daughter into his power."

"Why I am here I cannot now explain, but you must trust me and pledge your honor not to reveal my identity to any one, if I make known to you who I am as a proof that I speak the truth."

"Do you so pledge your word of honor to me, Don Ricardo?"

"I do, if your identity is proof that I can rely upon your word," was the reply.

"You shall be the judge of that, for I am Rudolph Revello."

CHAPTER XVII.

REVELLO'S BOLD STROKE.

BERTRANDO did not hear the words uttered by Rudolph Revello to the Don, but he saw the sudden start of the Spaniard and his quick glance into the disguised face of his captor who had turned the tables upon him.

Then he heard the words of the Don:

"I will believe you, senor, I do, and you may depend upon me to aid you."

"Thanks, senor, thanks."

"Now I will leave this man to your keeping, for I have important duties to perform, as you will know ere long."

With a wave of the hand he moved quickly toward the door, bowing to Marcelite who stepped aside to allow him to pass her, while she said eagerly:

"Oh senor! what does all this mean, I beg you to tell me?"

"Some day you will know all, senorita," was the hasty reply, and Revello passed out into the corridor and thus out of the hacienda.

He crossed the Plaza, went out of the gate in the wall, which the man in attendance there opened for him, and a moment after was skirting along the encircling road to where he had left Topaz.

The African was on the watch and confronted him.

"Come, Topaz, the captain is a prisoner to Don Ricardo, and we must regain the vessel with all haste."

"And the Senor Waldo and his men, senor?" asked Topaz.

"Must remain where they are to fall into a trap on the morrow."

"Come, we must reach the lagoon by a different path than the one we came and get on board the brig."

The negro at once moved forward in silence, Revello following, and they flanked the motte in which Waldo and his men were awaiting.

A rapid walk of nearly an hour brought them to the shores of the lagoon and Revello quickly hailed:

"Ho the Ocean Rapier ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, senor," came from the officer of the watch in response.

"Quick! send a boat ashore, get up anchor and set sail!" was the command of Revello.

"Ay, ay, senor," answered the officer, and at once all was excitement on board the brig.

A boat soon came to the shore and Revello and Topaz sprung into it and were rowed quickly back to the buccaneer craft.

The Mexican fully appreciated his desperate situation, but did not flinch.

What if the crew refused to obey his orders?

What if the Senor Waldo and his men should return to the shore before the brig should sail?

He dared not stop to think, the die was cast and he must trust to his usual luck and pluck to save him and accomplish his ends.

He soon reached the deck of the brig and there was no hesitation in his manner, no flinching from the ordeal before him.

"Senors, the captain is a prisoner, Senor

Waldo and his men entrapped, and up the lagoon here above us lies a vessel-of-war."

"We must get to sea with all haste or we are lost."

"To your posts all, and see that every man does his duty, or the yard-arm of a frigate will cast its shadow over him on the morrow!"

The buccaneer officers did not stop to think, for alarm was the paramount feeling that influenced all.

They saw their senior officer return without their captain, and Senor Waldo and his party were also left behind.

If it had been simply to land and recapture them from the people of a hacienda, they would have been willing.

But with the report that a vessel-of-war lay in the lagoon above them, that they must put to sea with all dispatch, or expect to be swung up at the yard-arm, they had but one desire, and that was to obey.

Perhaps later their lieutenant might explain more fully, but just then the only chance for them they believed was to obey his commands.

To a man, the half-score of pirate officers sprung to their posts of duty, and did obey, and the men, not understanding what it all meant, also obeyed with alacrity.

It was just what Revello had supposed they would do, and he smiled to himself as he saw the brig swing around and head out of the lagoon seaward.

When the shore was beyond hailing distance, and the voice of Senor Waldo could not have been heard to hail, be it ever so loud, Revello breathed more freely.

He saw astern off the hill the hacienda, brilliantly illuminated, and this told the officers and men that something was going on there of an unusual nature.

Revello saw his officers grouping together near him, as he stood upon the quarter-deck, and he knew that they expected some explanation regarding the loss of their captain, a lieutenant, and over one-third of the crew!

Revello took matters very coolly, however, gazed long and quietly through his glass toward the brightly lighted hacienda in the distance, and then said:

"Senors, I am sorry the captain saw fit to have his own way about getting into the hacienda, for it cost him his liberty, maybe his life, unless he can be rescued."

"The fact is, he went alone into the hacienda, and left Senor Waldo and his men to seek an entrance to the north, and at a gate a peon we met told him was unguarded."

"The peon deceived him, for the men went through the gate directly into the camp of the cattlemen; and as I had remained at the main gate, I heard a horseman dash up to the hacienda and report the capture of a number of pirates, one of whom stated that their chief was then visiting the Don, under pretense of being a Mexican officer."

"Topaz had gone into the hacienda with the captain, and he now came toward the gate at a run, and I was forced to kill the gatekeeper to allow of his escape."

"Come, Senor Master," cried my slave:

"There are officers visiting at the hacienda whose vessel-of-war is in the lagoon above the anchorage of the brig. Captain Bertrando is captured, and so are Senor Waldo and his men."

"Come Senor Master, and save the brig."

"You may be sure, senors, that I lost no time in hastening to the brig, and the situation as it stands you are now acquainted with; but had Captain Bertrando entered with his men at the main gate, where he did alone, he could have sacked the hacienda and made good his escape to the brig before the men from the frigate could have prevented."

"Now, senors, we will stand off until the land is well down and watch for what the morrow may develop, for it may be that we can rescue our gallant captain and his men."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE NEW CAPTAIN.

"MY usual luck, Topaz," said Captain Rudolph Revello with a smile of satisfaction, as he sat at breakfast in the cabin, the morning after his bold stroke and heard the report that the land was just visible, and in the lagoon they had anchored in the night before was a large vessel-of-war visible.

"Yes, Senor Master, the vessel seemed to have come there to help you out," said the African in return, and he chuckled over their good luck, for the negro had seen that some few of the crew were doubtful of the new captain, and he told him so.

"Doubt me do they, Topaz?"

"They do, senor."

"Well, I am captain of this vessel, and shall so remain."

"Yes, senor."

"You remember I suggested getting control when we were drifting in the boat together."

"I remember, master."

"It seemed like madness to you then, I suppose, for me to have such a thought, but it is a reality now, as you see."

"I do see, señor."

"I suppose I must, to save trouble, yield certain rights to the crew, so I shall run in ashore when I can, land with a force and make believe rescue the captain and our men."

"Yes, señor, it would be well."

"Of course, I will send you ahead to reconnoiter, and you can take word to the Don to be prepared for us, so as to beat us off, and the loss of a few more pirates will be all the better for me."

"Yes, señor."

"Now keep your eyes and ears open, Topaz, so as to inform me of all that occurs."

"I will, señor," assured Topaz, and he left the cabin.

Captain Revello mused for awhile in his pleasant cabin, a satisfied smile upon his dark, handsome face, for he felt that he was master of the situation.

Then he went on deck and turned his glass shoreward, where was visible, just off the lagoon, a large vessel-of-war.

"There is a smaller craft also, señor, just beyond the frigate, and she seems to have come out of the lagoon, and is now hidden by the large vessel," said an officer.

"Yes, I see her now just coming into view."

"I fear it is all up with poor Captain Bertrando and his men, for the frigate is Spanish beyond doubt, as Mexico has no such large vessel as that."

"I will stand in and draw them off in chase, and when we lose them at night, we can double on our course and run back to see if we can capture Captain Bertrando."

"If he is still in the hacienda, señor, and the vessels-of-war are not on the coast, we can capture him and the men."

"Yes, without doubt, Señor Ravilez."

"At any rate we can try, for Captain Bertrando has been a true friend to me, and I would not have harm befall him if it could be averted."

"If we fail, then I shall leave it to the officers and crew to decide who is to command them, for, as a stranger in your midst I may not be acceptable," and Revello again leveled his glass at the distant frigate, well knowing that his words would be repeated throughout the ship, and with good effect, as no one would believe him to be guilty of deserting the captain to his fate, or seeking the command of the Ocean Rapier unless it was offered to him with the consent of all.

Added to his words the appearance of the two vessels-of-war, the frigate and a schooner, most opportunely carried out his report the night before of there being a cruiser in the lagoon, something he had not dreamed of when he made the assertion.

He now gave the orders to run down toward the coast again, so that the brig would be sighted by the cruisers, for as yet she seemed not to have been seen by them.

The buccaneer brig had been but a few minutes upon her course landward, when it was supposed she was sighted from the frigate.

The glass showed several persons going up into the rigging, and soon after there was a signal flying and the schooner hastily put out to sea.

The schooner was already under way, and had run into the lagoon, while the frigate was anchored outside.

Believing the two vessels to have been in the lagoon during the night, the crew of the brig supposed that they had run out in chase of their craft, though Revello knew better.

He was aware that no vessel could go far beyond where the brig had anchored, and knew that the frigate and schooner were just cruising along the coast and happened to arrive off the lagoon at an opportune moment for him personally.

The frigate had dropped anchor off-shore, while the schooner had gone into the lagoon, doubtless searching for coast buccaneers.

Now the schooner was dispatched out toward the brig, while the frigate was getting up anchor and sail to follow.

Revello had every confidence in the fleet sailing qualities of the brig to outfoot the frigate, for the wind was fresh and steady, there being no prospects of a calm to bring him within reach of the cruiser's boats.

As for the little schooner he held no fear of her whatever.

Still he did not intend to trust himself too near the frigate's guns.

"Set the Mexican flag, Señor Ravilez," he said, as he saw the Spanish colors run up to the peak of the schooner and then on board the frigate.

"They will take us for the Mexican cruiser Rattlesnake, señor," was the answer of Ravilez as he obeyed the order given him.

"That is just what I wish them to believe," was the answer.

The Mexican flag was accordingly set and yet the brig held steadily on toward the shore.

At last Revello ordered the signal officers to set the signals that the buccaneer was the Mexican cruiser Rattlesnake, and in chase of the buccaneer brig Ocean Rapier, while the question was asked if the outlaw craft had been seen inshore by the frigate or the schooner.

The answer promptly came that the buccaneer brig Ocean Rapier was reported off the coast and they were in search of her.

Then the outlaw signaled that he would cruise seaward, and head in toward the coast again in a couple of days.

The pirate crew read the signaling with considerable added admiration for their new captain, as had the officers also, and the brig was headed away seaward once more under easy sail.

A lookout was kept aloft watching closely the frigate and the schooner, which had been so cleverly deceived, and those vessels were seen to continue their cruise slowly along the coast.

Thus twenty-four hours passed away, and then the prow of the Ocean Rapier was turned back toward the coast where was situated the hacienda of Don Ricardo Castile.

"Now we go to the rescue of our captain and his men," Revello had said, and his words were cheered by officers and crew, while the new captain was still more highly regarded by all on board the buccaneer craft.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MISSION OF TOPAZ.

It was after nightfall of the third day following her flight from the lagoon, when the buccaneer brig came in sight of the distant light that marked the hacienda of Don Ricardo Castile.

Not a thought had Revello of the frigate or schooner being in the lagoon, yet he was anxious that the crew should feel that he was on the alert to prevent a trap, and so he said on the quarter-deck:

"We will lay to here, Señor Ravilez, as we are within less than half a mile of the lagoon, and my slave can swim ashore and reconnoiter."

"If there are no vessels in the lagoon, then he can return and report and we will run in and land a force to march against the hacienda."

"Of course they will not expect an attack, and we can easily carry the place by storm, unless we can get secretly into the hacienda walls."

"If Captain Bertrando and his men are prisoners there, we can secure them; but if not then we must be content with the booty we secure from the hacienda, and the place is rich in plunder I assure you."

"But can the slave swim ashore, señor?" asked Ravilez.

"Oh yes, for he is a perfect fish."

"Here, Topaz, come to me."

At the call of his master Topaz at once approached.

"Disrobe yourself of your outer clothing, Topaz, spring into the sea and swim to the lagoon."

"Reconnoiter it fully and see if there is any vessel at anchor there."

"Then return to the brig, and lose no time about it, for we must reach the hacienda soon after midnight in order to get back with the rescued party and the plunder by dawn."

"I understand, master," was the response of Topaz and he made haste to obey.

He soon came on deck with only a garment about his waist and with a plunge went over the bulwarks into the sea.

They saw him disappear and that was all, and Revello descended into the cabin to get what rest he could while the slave was gone.

As for the crew they hoped that Topaz would be eaten by sharks and never return, for they had cause to stand in holy dread of the African.

His phenomenal strength, tiger-like movements, lightning quickness, added to his deformity, ferocity when aroused and weird nature, made him a terror to the superstitious sailors.

So they hoped, if the rescue of the captain and their comrades was postponed indefinitely, that Topaz would be eaten by the sharks that had been seen about the vessel for hours.

In the meanwhile Topaz had not the slightest dread of the sea monsters, for he had smeared his black shining body all over with an ointment which he knew would keep the sharks at a distance, as they dreaded the scent of it he was aware from experience.

He did not head toward the lagoon entrance however, when he sprung into the sea, but straight toward the shore, the light from the hacienda being his guide.

Where there was no landing there for a boat he could land he well knew with the sea quiet as it then was, and he swam with strong, swift strokes straight for the nearest shore.

The breakers were falling upon the rocks as he approached, though not heavily, and he so made his way as to land without accident.

The moment he reached the rocks he shook himself as a dog does, and then started off at a run straight for the hacienda lights a mile or more away.

Had he gone to the lagoon for a landing he would have had a couple of miles further to go on foot and twice the distance to swim.

He did not stop his long, swinging run until he had reached the gate of the hacienda, and his

call soon brought a cautious inquiry from within as to who was there asking admittance.

"Open the gate to receive this letter for Don Ricardo," he said.

The iron-studded gate was very cautiously opened the width of a chain that held it from within and the gate-keeper stood where there could be no shot fired from ambush.

Into the opening the African thrust his huge hand and it held a package wrapped securely with oiled silk to prevent its getting wet.

"Give this to Don Ricardo without a moment's delay for it is a question of life or death to him."

"Who shall I say sends it?" asked the keeper.

"It matters not; do as I say, or your life will be the forfeit."

The keeper asked another question, but got no answer, as Topaz was flying along the road leading to the lagoon.

He had carried out the secret instructions of his master and was hastening back to the brig.

He reached the shores of the lagoon at a point where navigation of other than a small boat ended, gave a quick, keen scrutiny of the waters, and then continued on his run along the marsh toward the sea.

He reached the point at the mouth of the lagoon, his eyes meanwhile having seen that there was no vessel at anchor there, and plunging into the waters, he headed out for the brig.

No light was allowed on board, and so it was some little time before he could place her in the darkness.

But soon, like a specter craft, the shadowy outline of the vessel came into view and he swam swiftly on, unmindful of the sea monsters about him, and which kept well out of his way, owing to the hated odor of the ointment he was covered with.

The crew stood looking over the bulwarks, watching for his return though hardly expecting it, and even the officers, as they heard the splashing of the sharks about the vessel, feeling sure that Topaz must have met a terrible fate.

They hardly expected him to go ashore and back within less time than three hours, and yet before two-thirds of that time had passed Señor Ravilez entered the cabin to report to Revello that the African had not returned.

Revello yawned as though awakened from a nap, glanced at the gold watch he carried, and then said:

"It is not yet time, Señor Ravilez, for he has been gone only two hours."

"Yes, señor, but the waters seem fairly alive with sharks."

"You know that they have followed in the brig's wake all day?"

"Yes, señor, but Topaz has no fear of sharks."

"No fear of sharks, Señor Captain?" asked Ravilez, with astonishment.

"Not the slightest fear of them."

"Give him time, and he will return all right."

And as Revello uttered the words there were heard startled cries on deck and then came the words:

"It is not Satan or a black spirit, but the captain's slave."

"He has returned," coolly said Revello, and he went on deck, accompanied by Ravilez.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MARCH INLAND.

THE African well knew how he was regarded by the buccaneer crew, and he took delight in adding to their terror of him in every way possible.

So he had made a circuit of the brig, as he saw the heads of the crew, looking over the bulwarks landward, and diving deep, had reached the chains, and suddenly sprung over the bows into the midst of half a hundred men.

That he was mistaken for Satan, or a black spirit of the deep by these superstitious outlaws, was not to be wondered at, and they shrank from him with cries of horror and terror.

It was these cries which had reached the ears of Revello and Officer Ravilez in the cabin, and they hastened on deck to find Topaz quietly coming aft, enjoying in his own grim way the terror he had caused among the crew.

He approached the group of officers aft, and bent low in salute to Revello, who said sternly:

"Well, slave, you have returned?"

"I have, Señor Master."

"You reached the shore?"

"Yes, señor."

"And obeyed my orders?"

"I did, señor."

"Is there a vessel in the lagoon?"

"There is no vessel there, señor."

"You saw no vessel, boats or men?"

"No, señor."

"It is well, Topaz, you did your duty as I ordered, and I will remember it."

"Now prepare to accompany me ashore," The slave saluted and retired, and Captain Revello turned to the pirate officers.

"Senors, you have heard my slave's report?"

All bowed.

"Now it is proof that the frigate and schooner went on up the coast, but whether they carried

Captain Bertrando and his men remains for us to find out.

"As they were Spanish vessels, I do not believe Don Ricardo Castile would surrender them as prisoners to the cruisers, but rather keep them at his hacienda until the Mexican Government could send a vessel after them.

"But if at the hacienda we must rescue them, and if not there we must get the rich booty that is there, and also avenge our comrades.

"You understand, señors, the situation?"

The frigate officers bowed, and Revello continued:

"Now I shall run into the lagoon and anchor, landing in boats, and pushing across to the hacienda.

"I must strip the brig of men, as we will need all the force we have, and Señor Morel and half a dozen of the crew will be enough to remain on board in charge," and Revello referred to the youngest of the officers, and one who he was very sure held no ambitious aspirations to turn pirate captain himself, and so would not run off with the vessel left in his charge.

The brig was accordingly headed in for the lagoon, and soon came to anchor there.

All but Revello felt anxious regarding the result.

The captain and a third of the crew, under Officer Waldo, had been captured, or killed, and two Spanish vessels had been seen on the coast, and there might be danger of their return, thought officers and men.

But Revello felt that the presence of the two cruisers there was an accident, and that they were then far away.

As to what had become of Waldo and his men he did not know; but he had certainly given Don Ricardo time enough to hunt them down, and he had left Bertrando a prisoner in irons, in the charge of a wicked brother whom he had every reason to fear for his own and his daughter's sake.

There was danger that some one of the men under Waldo might have escaped, and seeing the brig come in would join the land force and denounce him as a traitor; but he had to take such chances, and Topaz had his orders to look out for any one who might thus appear and silence him by a death-blow.

The boats pulled away from the brig with all but the young officer and half a dozen men of the crew, and a landing was soon made, the boats being left in charge of two men who were told to keep well off-shore, and only land when getting the proper command to do so.

Then the march inland began, Topaz leading by the side of his master.

The men were divided into platoons of eight, each under command of a pirate officer, and all were thoroughly armed.

At last the lights of the hacienda came in sight, and Captain Revello said:

"Señors, it is my intention to knock and gain admission into the walls.

"I will enter, followed by Topaz, and when we have mastered the guard I will give the signal for you to enter.

"Once within the walls we will have all our own way.

"Do you understand, señors?"

The officers bowed.

"Now, señors, there must be no wanton destruction here, only follow me, killing where we have it to do, and I will lead you to the hacienda vaults, where there is a vast treasure kept by the Don.

"Now we will advance, and once within the walls we must keep together, for the Don has a large number of servants and the place is well-guarded against attack.

"The captain and his men, if still held prisoners here, will be in the vaults, where the treasure is kept.

"Are you ready, señors?"

All signified their readiness to be led on to the rescue of their captain and comrades, and to enrich themselves with booty, a desire in their hearts paramount to the release of their shipmates, and Revello gave the order to move on.

It was past the midnight hour and only a single light was visible, shining from a tower seen beyond the high adobe walls surrounding the hacienda.

The house was a grand one, situated upon a hill heavily timbered, above which arose a ridge running back inland.

The adobe walls were high, thick and strong, with entrances here and there, and a Plaza was upon the south side running back to the hacienda; which was large enough to quarter a regiment of cavalry, horses and all.

The men crept up to the iron-barred gate and Captain Revello gave three loud knocks.

At first no reply came, and they were repeated.

Then from within the guards' quarters by the gate came a sleepy request to know who was without.

"I desire to see Don Ricardo Castile, for I have landed from my vessel now at anchor in the lagoon.

"I am a Mexican officer," responded Revello. And in response came the rattle of a chain: the drawing of an iron bolt, and in glided Revello and Topaz.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SURPRISE.

THE moment that Revello, again in the same disguise in which he had left the brig with Bertrando, the Buccaneer, stepped through the half-opened portal in the adobe wall, Topaz was close at his heels.

There was a man there in the Mexican attire, as seen by the light of the lantern he carried, and instantly he was seized by Revello and the African.

The lantern was placed upon the ground near the open gate, while the Mexican guard was dragged into the little hut near.

The men, or those nearest the open gate, saw the act and yet stood awaiting without the call of their commander to enter.

In a few minutes the signal was given, Revello and Topaz being still in the little guard-house.

Instantly the buccaneers rushed into the Plaza, led on by their officers, and they had just halted, awaiting for Captain Revello to come and place himself at their head, when from the hacienda, and the dark recesses of the walls came flashes of flame and the roar of musketry.

It was a complete surprise, and made known that the people of the hacienda were on watch, that they were not surprised by the coming of the buccaneers, but had been on the watch to give a surprise instead.

At the first fire a dozen men sunk down, either killed or wounded, and among them was an officer.

Then Revello darted out of the little cabin and his voice rung in startled tones:

"Retreat, men, for those shots came from men-o-war's men!

"Retreat for your lives, but do not fly in fear!"

The men crowded out of the gateway just as another volley came, and several more of their number went down.

"We cannot fight men in ambush, for it is useless.

"We must reach the boats, for the hacienda is well defended," cried Revello, and he placed himself at the head of his men.

The buccaneers were almost disheartened by this turn of affairs, for where they had gone to rescue their legitimate captain and their comrades, and to get a fortune in plunder, they had lost more of their number and had lost all booty.

Perhaps even they might be pursued by their foes, hemmed in and made to fight for their lives with the chances all against them.

This belief was added to by loud shouts from within the hacienda, and the firing of musketry over the walls.

Then came the ring of hoofs upon the stone Plaza and loud commands which set the buccaneers going at a double-quick.

Revello bade Topaz lead the way back toward the lagoon, by the nearest path, while he bravely remained in the rear to beat back any pursuers.

"Hal! They have gone around the road and we will save a mile on them.

"They will not dare press too close, fearing an ambush, and so we will reach the boats in good time.

"Steady, men, steady, and you who are unhurt aid your wounded and broken-down comrades."

All turned out as Revello had said, for the buccaneers reached the shores of the lagoon while the sound of the pursuers pushing on was yet a quarter of a mile away.

"Into the boats, lads; and pull for the brig," shouted Revello, and his orders were obeyed with a promptness that showed the men were in dire dread of capture.

"Ho the brig!" shouted Revello a moment after.

"Ay, ay, sir," responded the young officer left in charge of the vessel.

"Get up the anchor and let fall the sails as well as you can."

"Ay, ay, sir," came response, and as the last boat ran alongside of the brig the anchor had left the mud, while the sails were being set.

The wind was off-shore and the brig was soon moving seaward while her crew were hauling up the boats and spreading canvas.

The pursuers had meanwhile reached the shore of the lagoon and a few shots rattled forth toward the brig and Ravilez quickly asked:

"Can I toss a few shots among them, señor, and pay off the score for our dead comrades?"

"I only wish that we dared do so, Ravilez; but our heavy guns would be heard by the cruisers which must be near up or down the coast, for those who fired upon us were not cattle-men by any means."

"No, señor, I should think not; but as you say it would not do for the cruisers to hear our shots, for this wind is light, and may die out to a calm."

This idea seemed to convince Ravilez that the captain was on the safe side in not firing upon the party of pursuers ashore, and the same opinion went the rounds of the ship when the reasons of Revello were known.

The crew seemed to realize most fully that but for their captain being in command, they would have been entrapped at the hacienda and shot down or captured.

Revello accordingly rose still higher in the regard of his officers and men.

All felt that a bold move had been made to rescue Captain Bertrando and the others, and that it had failed was no fault of theirs.

But, it had failed, and with the brig now very short-handed, it was but right that they should think of their own safety.

Not a man of the crew was there who did not now congratulate himself upon having Revello for their new captain, for they had not the confidence in Señor Ravilez as a commander that they would have had in Cortez or Waldo, who would have become their chief under the circumstances but for the presence of the Mexican.

The dawn was not very far distant when the brig got an offing, and as the wind was still very light, the men looked shoreward anxiously to await the coming light.

It might reveal to them a large vessel-of-war—perhaps more than one—the boats of which in that light wind could readily overhaul their craft, if sent to the attack, and in numbers sufficient to carry her by boarding.

But the dawn came, and no vessel was in sight, so it was supposed by all that a crew had been left with the Don by the frigate, to protect his home, or the Government at Vera Cruz had sent some soldiers there.

Revello also gave this as his belief, and then he called his officers together and asked them if it was their wish that he should still retain command.

To a man they answered in the affirmative, and then Revello said:

"Well, señors, as I am to be your captain, I wish the brig put in perfect trim, and I know the very spot where this can be done in safety, so we will sail for the place I have in view at once."

And so the buccaneer brig was put away for a retreat on the shores of Mobile Bay, to undergo a thorough overhauling.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PIRATE'S TREASURE.

THERE was a stronger motive for sailing for Mobile Bay in the mind of Captain Revello than having the brig repaired.

She sadly needed repairs, that was certain, for she was rusty for want of paint, a number of ugly scars were visible in hull and spars, and the sails were patched alow and aloft.

Then, too, her rigging had been considerably cut up by shot in the various actions which she had been engaged in.

The motive that was foremost in the mind of Captain Revello for seeking a secure haven in Mobile Bay will soon be shown.

He had set the brig upon her course for the retreat, and then descended into his cabin.

Up to that time he had not felt so wholly sure of his position, fearing an outbreak of the crew.

But now he was captain to all intents and purposes and determined to assume the power as such.

Calling his faithful black comrade to him, he said:

"Well, Topaz, this looks as though I was the chief of this craft and crew."

"Yes, Señor Master, you have done as you said," was the reply of the African.

"Do you know, Topaz, why I am going to Mobile Bay?"

"No, señor."

"Well, Topaz, though I do not believe it possible that my—my—the cabin-boy, Ivan, I mean, could escape, still, should it be possible that he did, that the wreck did not go to pieces and be thus be taken off by some passing vessel, there would be two things he would do."

"Yes, señor."

"He would first seek my island retreat, and thinking that I might escape, lay a trap there to catch me in, should I go there, which I will not do."

"Did we go there, then that would end our lives, for you know the power held over the people of the Island Retreat by my wife, the Buccaneer Queen, and she would visit vengeance upon me for leaving the cabin-boy to lie in irons."

"Yes, señor."

The chief did not see the peculiar smile that flitted over the face of the African.

Had he done so he would have felt convinced that the negro knew that the cabin-boy was none other than his wife, Lucille.

But Captain Revello seemed to feel that the slave had no thoughts beyond what he made him think of.

"Now, Topaz, you see it would not be well for us to go to the retreat."

"No, señor."

"But should the cabin-boy escape and go to the retreat, then my wife would at once depart, I am sure, for her old home on Mobile Bay."

"Now, when I went there last, at the time I took her back to her old home, along with our little boy, and found her mother dead, the place

a ruin almost, and her father a madman, whom I was forced to kill, I buried there the treasure I had on board the brig with me.

"I now desire to place more treasure there, for what belonged to Captain Bertrando, the Buccaneer, is mine."

"Yes, señor."

"I shall look over the treasure and take the most valuable of it, and which can be easily hauled, for myself, and that means for you, too."

"The balance I shall divide between my officers and crew, and that will make me more popular with them."

"It will, señor."

"After the treasure, my part of it at least, is hidden away with the other, and we must get it ashore secretly, then we can depart, as soon as the brig is repaired, for a cruise."

"A cruise, señor?"

"Yes; but just where I will go I have not yet fully decided."

"The truth is, Topaz, I intend to wed the Senorita Marcelite Castile, and this act of mine, in becoming captain of the brig, will win me everlasting fame."

"Yes, señor."

"But of that we will not now speak, though to me the fortune looks all radiant now."

"Yes, señor."

"Now, let me ask you about your run to the hacienda."

"I ran there, Senor Master, gave the letter to the guard, and returned by way of the lagoon."

"Yes, I was sure of that, when our plans were carried out without a hitch."

"But I wish you to keep your eyes and ears open, Topaz, for all that goes on, and to tell me if there is any underhand work brewing."

"I'll do it, Senor Master; but the officers and men all regard you highly, and have no suspicion against you."

"It is well; but now I shall look over the treasure of Bertrando, who I hope has been hanged before this, and I am really anxious to know his fate."

"Let me have a warning if I am to be interrupted."

"I will, señor," responded the African, and he left the cabin."

For a few minutes the Mexican paced up and down the cabin in deep thought.

The wind was blowing lightly and the brig was gliding smoothly along.

At last Revello stepped to a closet in the panel work and unlocked it.

From within he took a key and raising a rug revealed a square trap in the floor of the cabin.

There was a keyhole in it, and into this he thrust the key, turning it twice, while he mused half aloud:

"It is lucky I watched Bertrando do this or I would have to break the secret hold open with an ax."

The lid was then raised by means of a key, coming out instead of opening upon hinges.

In each corner was visible a bolt, while in the corners of the trap were sockets into which they fitted when locked, each turn of the key shooting a bolt, or drawing it back to open it.

The opening revealed was some two feet square and three feet deep and it was iron-lined.

There was a quantity of massive silver plate in it, some boxes and several bags heavy with gold, while there was also some loose jewelry, diamond-hilted swords and other valuables.

"Here is a fortune for me to all appearances."

"If those boxes have gems then I am a rich man; but I will be generous, as I can afford to be, for one-third of it goes to the crew, and that simply means a gift to my Government."

"Well, it's a bold game I am playing, but pluck and determination will carry me through all right."

So saying he began to open the boxes.

They were locked, but the keys were attached to them by a ribbon, and as the lid of each one was opened the eyes of the Mexican sparkled with avaricious delight.

"Bertrando was a man of taste, and he has left me a very liberal fortune, I must confess."

"A short while since adrift in an open boat, dying of thirst and hunger, and now commander of a craft only second to my beautiful wrecked brig, and with every prospect before me brightening."

"Now to value my treasure."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE HIDDEN RICHES.

THE boxes which Revello found in the cabin of the buccaneer Bertrando contained jewelry of rare value, and precious stones.

With the eye of a man who well knew the value of gems and gold, Revello went over the contents of the pirate treasure, and made selections for himself.

These he carefully put aside and hid away in his state-room.

The rest of the treasure was returned to the secret receptacle, and the lid was put on and locked.

Then Revello went on deck and had a little conversation with Ravilez.

The result of this conversation was that other

officers were called, and Senor Ravilez made known the fact that their new captain was a very generous man.

In truth he had proposed that, as Captain Bertrando was beyond rescue, and the men with him, that the treasure of the former chief, Senor Waldo and their comrades should all be put together and divided, he, Revello, as one who had not helped secure the booty, merely taking the share that would come to him as an officer, not as captain.

This proposition was received with delight by the officers, who voted the new captain a most generous man and a splendid fellow.

Bertrando, Waldo and the others had held no interest for them, they felt, and the proposition was at once made to the crew.

Of course, as captain, Revello would have been entitled to one-third the treasure, and the officers the second third, the other being divided among the men.

All costs to keep the brig going were of course expected to come out of the captain's third, but as the vessel captured her supplies and fittings there was really nothing for Bertrando to buy.

With Revello chipping in the captain's share, to be divided, he coming in simply as an officer, and Waldo's share, with those of the lost men which had been left upon the brig, it gave to those on the vessel a very snug sum, and this further carried favor for the new commander in the eyes of the avaricious pirates.

The men were fairly wild with enthusiasm and Captain Revello bade Ravilez and another officer, if they knew where Bertrando kept his treasure, to bring it upon deck.

They soon found it, and Senor Waldo's and the captured and slain seamen's booty was also put in the general contribution.

Of course not a man knew that Revello already had hidden away the lion's share of Bertrando's treasure, and in the division the men were most willing to be generous toward the new captain, a generosity he would not bear to, as he said he had not risked his life in securing the booty.

Considering that he had what he had kept hidden away from Bertrando, after coming on board the brig, then what he had robbed the secret hold of, and next what he received in the division, he had done so well that his share was greater than all the others together.

As long as this was not known, or even suspected, it was all well for Revello.

He did make one claim, and that was for Topaz, who he said should share as a sailor.

Of course not a man disputed this, for they had no desire to receive the greater ill-will of the African.

At last Dauphin Island came into view and by night the brig glided into the pass leading up Mobile Bay.

Revello took the wheel himself, and having entered by night, he hoped unseen, he was anxious to find his hiding-place before dawn.

The wind held fair, and keeping well over toward the eastern shore he ran into his place of refuge in the gray of early daybreak, not far from the deserted ruin of Spanish Fort.

The brig was at once beached, as it was high tide, and the men set to work to clean and paint the bottom, while others bent on new sails, rigged new spars and patched up the scars which shot had made in the vessel and her rig.

Thus the day passed, and the night coming on Revello made known to Senor Ravilez that he should run across to Mobile, accompanied only by Topaz, and seek what news he could, while he would also bring back much-needed stores and other things necessary in the repair of the vessel.

"I shall run in by night, get what I need to-morrow and return the next night, as I care not to be pursued, or even suspected," he said to Ravilez.

He had no fear of the brig being run off with by her officers, who might be ambitious of being in command, as she was still beached and would not be in condition for sailing under a couple of days at furthest.

Topaz had orders to put certain things in the boat, and thus the treasure was smuggled aboard, Revello took the tiller, the African stood by the sheet balyard and the run to Mobile was begun.

But the prow of the boat was not turned directly across the bay after leaving Spanish River, but instead headed for the Red Cliffs down upon the eastern shore a league or more.

A small creek was found running into the bay below the Red Cliffs and into this the boat was run, the helmsman seeming to know the waters and shores perfectly.

A landing was then made and both Revello and the negro moved up a vale, each carrying a heavy load upon their shoulders.

They skirted around a hill, crossed a rugged valley, and a stream, and ascending a steep ridge, halted upon a spur.

It was a wild, desolate spot, and where it would seem no one would ever penetrate.

The negro then took from a canvas in which they were wrapped, a spade and shovel, and the two men, so widely different, set to work digging.

The sod was carefully removed and placed upon the canvas, then the dirt, and soon the shovel of the negro rung upon a hard substance.

"It is the box, Topaz."

"Yes, señor."

"Open it, and we will put in the other treasure."

"Yes, señor." And the African obeyed.

A lantern was then lighted and held down into the hole, revealing a box filled with treasure, such as bags of gold and silver, jewelry and gems.

The treasure brought by Revello and Topaz was then placed in the box along with what was there, the lid was replaced, and then the dirt and sod.

Every particle of dirt that had been left upon the canvas was then taken and thrown into the stream, and the lantern revealed the fact that there was not a trace of the hiding-place of the treasure, such as would attract mortal eye, should one be led to that out-of-the-way, desolate spot.

"Now, Topaz, we have the fortune of a prince there in that hole, and I should be content."

"But I am not, for I must have the fortune of the Senorita Marcelite," said Revello, and in his quiet way Topaz answered:

"Yes, Senor Master."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A HAUNTED MAN.

HAVING satisfied himself that there was not a trace of their visit visible around the secret burying-place of the riches which he had placed there upon some former occasion and then added to that night, Revello said:

"Now, Topaz, you return to the boat and await my coming."

"Should I need you, I will give my call."

"I will be ready, señor," said the faithful African, faithful in crime though he was, and he put out the lantern, took up the utensils they had used in digging, and wended his way back down the valley, toward the creek where the boat had been left.

The Mexican meanwhile went along the ridge toward the top of what was known as the cliffs, or Red Cliffs.

He passed around a tumble-down fence which had encircled a large vegetable garden now overrun with weeds and grass, and came out in a path running along the summit of the cliff.

It had once been a well-traveled road it seemed, but now it was overrun and neglected.

There was a growth of heavy timber upon the ridge, and from the elevation a grand view of the bay could be had, and up and down the coast as well.

There were visible far across the bay in the distance, the lights that marked the situation of the town of Mobile, and to the northward lay the dark spur upon which was the ruins of Spanish Fort.

Following the path and walking slowly, the Mexican halted at a turn and said aloud:

"It was here that he attacked me and I killed him."

"And all the while beneath her velvety manner, Lucille was plotting revenge because I killed her father."

"I wonder if the old home is occupied now save by spirits and vanishing memories?"

"Ah me! this is a strange life that I am leading, a double life, but it will end soon, and I will be the richest of the rich, envied by all men, my gold and my beautiful bride."

"My God! what if Lucille should have escaped death after all and have returned here to her old home?"

"I could not resist the inclination to come here and find out."

"If she has, and is here, then she must die, for large as this world is, it is too small for her and I to dwell in together."

"If she is here, then my boy is here with her."

"If she is dead, then some day I will look up the boy, for why should he become what I have been, what I am?"

"Ah, no! he must not be that."

"And yet I cannot have him near me to constantly bring up phantoms of the past. I must now forget—"

"Bosh! I believe I am getting weak-hearted, for why should I allow phantoms to fret me?"

"I will go to the cottage and see if she is there, for somehow the thought will haunt me that she did not die—that she is not dead."

He passed on along the pathway until in the darkness there loomed up before him upon his right a mansion.

It was almost hidden in foliage and surrounded by flowers, the scent of the latter filling the air.

He halted at the gate, fallen from its hinges, and gazed down the gravel walk toward the piazza.

It was some time before he entered and at last stood upon the piazza.

All was dark and silent!

Not a sound broke the stillness save the break of the waves upon the beach at the base of the cliff far below.

He knocked at the door, first lightly, then loudly, as no answer came.

Only the echo of his knock was heard, and no one came or asked his errand.

He turned the latch of the door and entered, for it was unlocked.

His footsteps echoed dimly through the halls as he went from room to room in the darkness, finding his way readily as though perfectly familiar with the spot.

At last he turned and made his way to the outer door, and stood on the piazza.

"She is not here, and standing in this old house I feel that she is dead, that I can feel her spirit hovering about me."

"I now know that it has been only the fatality of my fevered brain, that she is alive, that she escaped death in the wreck, loaded as she was with iron chains."

"It was a cruel fate perhaps— Hal what sound was that?"

The man started and listened, the cold sweat breaking out upon his brow.

"I distinctly heard my words repeated—cruel fate."

"My God! I cannot stand this, for brave as I am I see that I too can be made to feel—that I am a haunted man."

"A haunted man?"

The words were like an echo of his own, yet strangely distinct, almost threatening they seemed.

He started again and moved toward the gate. Then he gained courage and laughed in a derisive way at his fears.

"Hal hal hal! I am a fool to fear aught that is dead or alive," he said aloud.

"Hal hal hal!" came the echo, if echo it was, and then faintly were heard the words:

"A fool, dead or alive!"

"I cannot stand this," cried the man, now thoroughly alarmed, and he started quickly toward the gate.

As he turned from the dark path, overhung with dense foliage, he breathed more freely, but yet it seemed to him that he was followed.

He distinctly heard the sound of following footsteps.

He halted and the sound ceased.

He resumed his way and once more he heard the footsteps.

Then it seemed that the air grew more chill, and there appeared to be a rustling of the leaves about him.

Something brushed his face and he uttered a cry, and then cursed himself for a coward when he discovered that it was only the foliage of an overhanging limb.

But he quickened his pace, and the steps behind him did the same.

He halted, drew his sword and rushed back among the trees.

But no one was there.

He called, but no answer came.

"Lucille! is that your spirit that haunts me?" he cried.

"Spirit that haunts me," was the echoing reply, and with a thrill of horror the man turned and walked swiftly away along the path.

The steps behind him were again heard, and quickening his pace he irresistibly began to run until he was soon flying along like a deer.

He reached the spot where he had slain Lucille's father; and it seemed that he heard mocking laughter.

Down the steep path he bounded, across the beach to the shore of the little creek, and there he found Topaz and the boat awaiting.

"Quick! for the love of God get me away from this spot!" he cried, and the strong arms of the African sent the boat flying out of the creek.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN PORT.

TOPAZ had heard the coming footsteps of his master, and felt that something was wrong, that he was pursued.

So he turned the prow of the boat quickly seaward, seized the oars, and the moment Revello sprung into the stern, had sent it out of the creek.

It was but a short pull, then over the bar and into the waters of the bay, where the winds struck the sail, which was hanging limp before to the mast.

A small jib was also set, and the boat was headed directly out from the shore, the distant lights from the tower being the objective point.

Not a word did the African say, and it was a long while before his master spoke.

Revello was striving to regain his breath and composure.

At last he said, and his voice was calm now, for he had gained control of himself thoroughly, as he saw the cliff growing dim astern with distance:

"Topaz?"

"Yes, Senor Master."

"Did you see any one chasing me?"

"No, senor."

"Did you hear any footfalls save my own?"

"Yes, senor."

"But you saw no one?"

"It seemed to me, senor, when I saw you that you were enveloped in a white robe."

"My God!"

"So it seemed, senor."

"A robe around me?"

"The white seemed like a vail about you, senor."

"But you saw no form?"

"None, senor."

"Topaz, do you believe in ghosts?"

"Yes, senor."

"You believe that the dead can come back to life?"

"I do, senor."

"Well, so do I—now."

"Senor?"

"I saw a spirit to-night."

"You saw a spirit?"

"Well, no; but, I felt one."

"You felt its presence, senor?"

"That is just it."

"Whose spirit, senor?"

"It was the spirit of my wife."

"Ah! poor lady, she is dead."

"Yes; but I can never go to that shore again, and I never will, save to get the treasure I have buried there."

"It was horrible, Topaz."

"Yes, senor."

"I am not a man who knows fear, and yet I fled in terror to-night, in terror from a phantom, a ghost, a woman's spirit, Topaz."

"I understand, Senor Master."

"And you helped me well, Topaz, and now we are headed for the town."

"Tomorrow night we will return to the brig and the following day we can put to sea."

"Yes, senor."

"She will be in perfect trim for a cruise, though her crew will be small, as we have little over half a hundred men, Topaz."

"I understand, senor."

"But we are to go upon a cruise that I have made known to no one—it will surprise even you, Topaz."

"Yes, senor."

"It will surprise many others, and hurt many too."

"But the misery of one half the world, Topaz, brings happiness or contentment to the other half."

"Yes, master."

The Mexican was silent now for a long while, not speaking again until the boat ran into the Mobile River.

Revello held the helm and seemed to know his surroundings well, for he guided the boat to a secure wharf below the town.

There were a few dozen vessels in the harbor and the dim street-lamps swung to and fro lazily under the pressure of the wind.

Making the boat secure while Topaz was furling the sail, Revello said simply:

"Come!"

The African followed in silence, and the Mexican led the way to a tavern, within which were heard many voices, though it was then nearly dawn.

A knock at the side door caused it to be opened, and a man with a dark, Spanish face appeared.

"Ho, Senor Bolero, I greet you."

"Ah! the Senor—"

"Sh! do not call names here; but I wish lodging and food for myself and slave."

"You can have both, Senor Captain."

"Come right in."

Revello obeyed and was followed by Topaz, the landlord of the inn leading the way upstairs to what was a very comfortable room overlooking the river and bay.

"Here, senor, you will be comfortable and your black can sleep on the rug yonder."

"But it is a surprise to see you—and a pleasure."

"I came over just to see you, Senor Bolero; but bring some food and wine, for we are starved, and then I shall rest until late to-morrow, for the purchases I have to make you can arrange for me."

"Of course I will, Senor Captain," and with this the landlord hastened away.

But he soon returned with wine and food, and placed them before the Mexican.

"Any vessels-of-war in port, Bolero?"

"The American brig-of-war, Battle Bird, senor, Captain Louis Dudley, is here."

"I have reason to know both the man and his vessel."

"He is a fine fellow, but I would not wish to fall into his clutches under existing circumstances."

"But is the schooner-of-war, Spiteful, here, Lieutenant Archer Dean commanding?"

"No, senor."

"When was she here last?"

"Not since she went off in chase of you, on your last visit to these waters."

"I am sorry, for I had hoped she was either here, or at the bottom of the Gulf."

"She may be the latter, senor, for we have had some terrible tornadoes of late, as you doubtless know."

"Yes, I do, to my sorrow, for my brig was wrecked, though I have another vessel now."

"Well, find out all you can of the Battle Bird's movements, get these purchases for me, which I have made a list of here for you, and you will find my boat at your dock—a yawl, bearing the name of Sphinx on her bows."

"I'll find her, senor."

"Have a watch put over her and the things you get stored away in her, for I wish to start back after dark to-night."

"Yes, captain. All will be ready for you."

"But, then, your vessel is near?"

"Not so far away, Bolero, but that I can reach her within a few hours' sail."

"Good-night, now, and let me sleep until after-noon."

"Yes, senor," and the landlord departed from the room, leaving Revello and Topaz to seek the rest they greatly needed, for dawn was just then breaking.

CHAPTER XXVI.

UNDER FALSE COLORS.

THE day had nearly gone by when Revello awoke from his deep, dreamless sleep, and found himself in the inn of Landlord Bolero.

Topaz had rested but a few hours, and rising noiselessly from his rug had finished the remains of the supper and wine and seated himself at the window to gaze out upon the harbor.

It was a panorama constantly before his eyes, of vessels running in to an anchorage or leaving one for the sea, sail-boats and row-boats moving about and the wharves filled with busy men.

The African seemed perfectly content to gaze and it interested him wholly.

At last the Mexican awoke and gazed curiously about him.

"Ah! I remember now where I am."

"There is Topaz, too," and he sprung from the comfortable bed and gave the bell-cord a pull.

Landlord Bolero soon appeared, and Revello enjoyed the breakfast brought him.

"Any news, Bolero?"

"I think, senor, the Battle Bird, brig-of-war, is preparing to sail with all dispatch, for men are at work upon her."

"Ah! and when can she get away?"

"Hardly before the morrow will she be in condition."

"That is good; but have you no idea of the cause of her haste?"

"Some news brought in by a fisherman, I heard, that a pirate had been seen running along the coast of the Gulf and the lower bay."

"That means my brig has been seen; but I'll be ready to sail before dawn, and I must get away from here by sunset."

"Yes, senor, by sunset, for your purchases are made and all will be ready."

"Good! Now go out and see if you can glean any more news about the sailing of the Battle Bird."

This Bolero did and it was nearly sunset when he returned.

"Senor Captain, it is said that the pirate is hiding in some of the lagoons, and the Battle Bird will be ready by dawn to leave, for she was undergoing repairs when the news came in."

"Then the orders are that no boat is allowed to leave the river, but as I am allowed to send down for my fish and oysters, I went to Captain Dudley and got a permit to run out with my boat, so you will have to leave your yawl and take mine, or rather go with me."

"Can you not take mine in tow, saying it is loaded with stores for your fishermen?"

"I'll try it; but if not, we can shift the things to my boat, and you can go in my cutter."

"Well, arrange it as you will, but I must depart at sunset, for if I do not reach my brig she is lost, that is certain."

"I'll do all in my power for you, Senor Captain, as you know," was Bolero's answer, and he again left the room.

The hour passed away anxiously to Captain Revello, but just as it began to grow dark Bolero returned, and he carried two disguises.

"You and the black must go as fishermen, captain, and I go with you, towing your boat."

"I must head us to my camp of fishermen down the bay, while you go your way, and let me tell you that the brig has a double force working on her, to get away in chase of this pirate, whoever he may be, or wherever," and Bolero laughed in a grim way.

Revello hastily slipped on his disguise, as did Topaz, and soon after, with boxes on their shoulders, they left the inn and made their way, accompanied by the landlord, toward his wharf.

There were two men already at Bolero's boat, but the yawl of Revello was there, well loaded, and it was taken in tow by the cutter, which alone raised sail.

Down the river glided Bolero's boat, and when hailed by a guard-boat, gave the password he had agreed upon with the captain of the American brig-of-war, so that he was allowed to pass unmolested.

Once he had dropped the town well astern, the yawl was cast off by Bolero, at a command from Revello, sail was set by Topaz, and the little boat went dashing away, her course laid for Spanish River.

The wind was fresh and she went bowling rapidly along, Revello losing no opportunity to increase her speed, for he was all anxiety to reach his vessel.

A run of three hours brought them alongside of the brig, which had floated now, as it was high tide, and her hull had been fully cleaned and painted.

Then Captain Revello got aboard the stores brought, repairs were quickly finished and before dawn the brig was standing down the bay.

"Light ho!" cried the lookout just as dawn was breaking.

Turning his glass upon the light, Revello said, calmly:

"It is the brig-of-war, and she has headed us off."

"She got away sooner than Bolero expected she would, and she has evidently knowledge that we are up here."

"I must play a game to deceive her captain, seniors, and if that does not do, then we must fight it out."

That all were anxious on board the Ocean Rapiet there is no doubt, but then there appeared to be the greatest confidence felt in Revello.

His first order was to dress the officers in the Mexican uniform, the crew also, and to instruct them that they were to pretend to be the Mexican brig-of-war Rattlesnake.

It was not very long before the Mexican brig was sighted from the decks of the Battle Bird, for the day had dawned and every eye was on the watch. The buccaneer was holding on her course down the bay, while the American brig was heading across her bows, and the drums were heard beating to quarters.

Revello was as calm as a May morn, and kept his glass upon the brig-of-war to watch any movement on board.

He saw that the men went to quarters with a will, the guns were run out and all was ready for action.

Off his port quarter lay Red Cliffs, over which the rosy light of the rising sun dispelled every shadow, where the night before he had been pursued, as he believed, by a spirit form.

As the sun appeared there was a roll of bunting run up to the peak of the brig-of-war, and the fighting flag of her captain to the fore, showing that Louis Dudley, her commander, was in deadly earnest.

Then came a flash from the bows of the Battle Bird and a solid shot flew over the decks of the buccaneer, and not any too high for safety.

Assured that he had a pirate to deal with, Captain Dudley was not at all backward in sending his first shot as a command to come to.

To the surprise of all upon the American brig-of-war, a ball of bunting ran up to the peak of the stranger and another to the fore.

One was the Mexican flag, the other was a rattlesnake in a blue field, the colors of Captain Rudolph Revello.

At the same instant almost, to avoid a broadside from the brig-of-war, the buccaneer vessel swept up into the wind and lay to, obeying the command of the cruiser for her to do so.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FLYING THE BLACK FLAG.

RUDOLPH REVELLO was as cunning as he was brave and wicked.

He was in a trap unless he could extricate himself, and only pluck and boldness could do it, for a combat with the brig-of-war meant sure defeat to him.

His crew were untried to him, the vessel also in a manner, and with his small number of men to fight against double their force would surely end in disaster.

As the brig came on, her men at their guns, those on board appearing to suspect treachery of some kind, Revello ordered his barge lowered away, and instructing all as to their duty, pulled for the Battle Bird, which seeing him, lay to an eighth of a mile from the buccaneer.

It was Revello's intention to thus head her off from coming too near by boarding the enemy and reporting as a Mexican commander.

He well knew the danger he ran, and that he had before met Captain Dudley, in council with Lieutenant Archer Dean of the schooner Spiteful, when his own vessel had been brought to as the very vessel he was now on, the buccaneer brig, Ocean Rapiet.

Then he had won the day, proving that he was in reality Captain Rudolph of the Mexican brig-of-war Rattlesnake, but could he now do so as the commander of the pirate?

That was just the bold game he intended to play, and when he was hailed from the brig-of-war he responded promptly:

"Captain Revello of the Mexican brig-of-war Rattlesnake desires to come aboard and visit Captain Louis Dudley of the Battle Bird."

Captain Dudley uttered an oath at this.

He was sure that he had caught the pirate brig Ocean Rapiet under Bertrand, and now he was deceived in finding her to be the Mexican brig Rattlesnake which before he had mistaken for a buccaneer.

And Revello congratulated himself upon having in his overhauling the buccaneer craft made her look as much like his own vessel as was possible.

"Captain Dudley will be glad to welcome Captain Revello on board," responded the officer of the deck, and Revello's barge moved toward the brig.

He was met at the gangway with honors, and escorted to the cabin, where Captain Dudley said:

"I am glad to meet you again, Captain Revello, and as before it is under circumstances where your vessel was mistaken for that pirate Bertrand, for I have worked a treble force of men for twenty hours to come after you."

"I regret the trouble I have put you to, Senior Captain; but I also am on the track of Bertrand the buccaneer and ran up your bay here under information given me by a fisherman that the Ocean Rapiet had been seen in these waters."

"Ah! then I am cheered with the hope of finding him, as it is not your vessel that was taken for him."

"How far have you cruised up the bay, may I ask?"

"Up into Spanish River, and where I lay by to fit up a little as I needed it; but may I ask the whereabouts of Lieutenant Archer Dean of the schooner-of-war Spiteful?"

"I have not seen him since we parted company in the Gulf; but he is doubtless cruising on the coast of your country, for he is most anxious to capture the counterpart of your brig, the Ocean Rapiet, as you are."

"Yes, I wish to wipe that vile pirate from off the sea, I assure you, for he has, as you know, senior, been the cause of a number of severe reflections upon myself."

"In fact I would not be surprised if I was some time tried for piracy on account of Bertrand's actions, for his brig is indeed the counterpart of my vessel."

"They are wonderfully alike, sir; but you will surely honor me by remaining to breakfast with me?"

Revello bowed and accepted the invitation, the two vessels meanwhile lying to, the American greatly disappointed that they had not had to deal with the pirate Bertrand, and the crew of the buccaneer brig anxious as to the outcome of the long stay of their captain on board the Battle Bird.

But at last the boat was seen to put off, and Captain Revello was soon upon his own deck, when he promptly gave the orders to head down the Bay toward the Gulf.

"I played the captain of the Mexican brig-of-war, Rattlesnake, seniors," he said with a smile, as he rejoined his anxious officers upon the quarter-deck of his own vessel.

"The American captain regretted not finding in our vessel Bertrand the pirate, and so urged me to remain to breakfast with him, which I did."

"We now go down the Bay into the Gulf together, in search of the pirate Bertrand; but I shall dodge the American, you may be certain, the first chance I get, for I would hate to have the schooner-of-war, Spiteful, put in an appearance here just now," and Revello laughed, for it will be remembered that he did not know that the tornado which had wrecked his brig had sent the Spiteful also to the bottom.

His officers joined with him in his laugh at the clever deception practiced upon the American, and it was soon known to the crew, who regarded their new commander still more highly as a man of nerve and clever ruses when brought face to face with desperate danger, for, reckless as were the buccaneers, they had not cared to test their strength in a combat with an American vessel-of-war.

Down the Bay sailed the two brigs, the American slightly heavier in tonnage than the buccaneer, though her armament was lighter.

She doubled the pirate in the number of men, however, and it would have been a desperate lot of buccaneers that could have beaten off Captain Louis Dudley and his splendid seamen.

As the brigs sailed along together it was seen that both vessels were beautiful models and carried a large spread of canvas.

The buccaneer, however, seemed to sail on a more level keel in spite of her masts soaring aloft some fifteen feet above those of the Battle Bird, while her bowsprit was longer and also her yards.

She was certainly built for rapid going and seaworthy qualities.

Though the American had the wind of the buccaneer, the latter, with the same sail set as her rival, now began to forge ahead.

Captain Dudley had extra canvas set, but the result was the same, although the buccaneer did not add to her sail.

She was clearly the fleetest of the two brigs, and those on board the cruiser realized that had they come upon a stern chase, and the other brig had been, as they now did not believe her to be, a pirate, they could never have overhauled her unless they had crippled her so as to enable them to come to close quarters in action.

And then, sailing under false colors, the buccaneer brig headed out toward the Gulf, with an honest cruiser following in her wake and by no means hostile toward what she too believed an honest craft.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

OCEAN ROVERS TO THE RESCUE.

THE two brigs reached blue water with the buccaneer leading the cruiser fully a quarter of a mile, though the former had not increased her canvas, where the latter had done so to a great degree.

It was a disappointment to Captain Dudley and his crew to see their crack vessel thus beaten by a foreign craft, while the pirates were greatly elated over their triumph.

Once the two vessels had sped out into the blue Gulf, Captain Revello signaled that he would follow the shores around as far as the Balize, if that was satisfactory to Captain Dudley.

It seemed perfectly so, for Captain Dudley signaled back that he would hunt the shores as far as Tampa before his return.

Thus the two brigs parted company, and if the American had only known how cleverly they had been deceived, they would have torn their hair in their rage and mortification.

On board the outlaw craft the crew were half-wild with delight, and Revello could hardly restrain them from breaking forth in yells of triumph at their escape.

He received the congratulations of his officers in his quiet way, and at once became the idol of his men, who little dreamed that they, too, were being deceived, that they had over them the very captain whom their chief had pretended to impersonate.

They did not know, as had Captain Bertrand and Waldo, that Revello was the captain of the Rattlesnake, and well for him was it that they did not.

Once the Ocean Rapiet had gotten well out of sight of the Battle Bird, sail was spread upon her, the course was changed from heading toward the Balize, and Senior Ravilez was startled by the order to head for Vera Cruz.

The officers were not yet accustomed to the surprises of their new captain, Bertrand having cruised about as methodically as a man-of-war.

"It will be a little risky, Senior Captain, will it not, to venture so near Vera Cruz with our diminished crew?" said Senior Ravilez, in a slight tone of remonstrance.

"It is because I am weak in crew, Senior Ravilez, that I am going," answered Revello, with no sign of anger at the remonstrance.

"The situation is just this," he continued, and in a tone that the other officers could hear as well as the men at the wheel, for he wished it to be known through the ship.

"If Captain Bertrand was not taken on board the Spanish frigate or schooner, and I see no reason why he should have been, captured as he was in Mexico, then he will have been sent to Vera Cruz."

"And Senior Waldo and the men, Captain Revello?"

"They will have been sent with him also."

"Now I have no reason to believe that they were executed, so they must have been dispatched to Vera Cruz."

"If so they are confined in the *carcel*, and awaiting execution, which will hardly be for several weeks yet, as the *Junta* is a slow-moving body of men."

"Now the *carcel* is near the harbor shore and not far from it is the Banque of Vera Cruz, which is not guarded save by one marine at night."

"It is a lonely place at night, and to get to the *carcel* one must pass by the banque."

"I therefore have an idea of doing a good deed toward our comrades and also to ourselves."

"If our comrades are there we can rescue them, and also get the gold-out of the vault of the banque."

"I have successfully passed as the captain of the Mexican brig-of-war Rattlesnake, and this vessel has also passed as that cruiser, so we can run in by night, anchor off the *carcel*, and I will land with a force of men dressed in uniform."

"I will state to the commandant of the *carcel* that I am authorized by the *Junta* to take the prisoners on board my vessel for safe-keeping."

"While we are at the *carcel*, Senior Ravilez and several of his men can capture the marine, put one of his own party on duty, enter the banque and get out the gold."

"By this move we can enrich ourselves, men, and also aid our comrades to escape from the gallows, for I feel sure they are confined there."

"It is a bold move, seniors, but I am sure it will come right in the end, and it is only by bold acts that we can make our fortunes."

"I will first land, however, and see that all is safe ere I take a crew ashore, and suspected of being the cruiser Rattlesnake there will be no doubt whatever of our going in and out of the harbor of Vera Cruz past the San Juan de Ulea, for I know the private signals of the fort."

This proposition of Revello fairly dazed his officers by its boldness.

They looked at him with dumb admiration at his magnificent courage, and yet when they

talked it all over they felt assured that it was possible and could be accomplished.

If they captured the gold in the banque, it would repay them, and more, for the loss of the treasure they would have to return by the rescue of their captain and comrades.

It was a scheme that they entered into with more willingness, as there were several of their number who knew the situation of the prison and banque in Vera Cruz and felt that the rescue and robbery could be accomplished without a hitch.

Ind by such a man as Revello was proving himself to be, the buccaneers began to believe that they would know no such word as fail in anything they might undertake.

So the officers talked it all over, and the two wheelmen soon had it spread among the crew, who, almost to a man were ready for the expedition.

"If it's a breezy night so we won't get calmed in the harbor, it can be done without a hitch or loss of a man," said the boatswain of the buccaneer brig.

And this was the decision of all, and of course they felt that Revello was not the man to run into the port of Vera Cruz unless there was wind enough to allow him to get safely to sea again in case of trouble.

So away went the Ocean Rapier on her course for Vera Cruz, and the men were all anxiety to know just how the bold undertaking would terminate.

But, as for Revello he was wholly unmoved in manner and face, whatever he might feel, while Topaz wore his accustomed listless air of utter indifference to all going on about him, unless he was aroused by some wrong being done him.

And one afternoon came the cry of land ho, while far away off over the seas were visible the turrets of the San Juan de Uloa, the giant sentinel that guards the harbor of Vera Cruz, giving it the name of the Iron Gate of Mexico.

CHAPTER XXIX. THE PRISONER.

I WILL now return to the scene that followed the capture of Bertrando the Buccaneer in the house of Don Ricardo Castile.

Whatever intention the outlaw chief may have had regarding getting money from his brother, when he went to the hacienda, he soon became convinced that the best way to make terms would be to get the man and his daughter in his power.

He felt convinced that there was a love affair between Revello and Lucille and that to state that the prisoner lay dangerously wounded aboard his vessel would get the Don and the maiden there without any delay.

That Revello would dare to go against him in the matter he did not believe, and so his surprise and rage may be well imagined when he was put under the muzzle of the Mexican's pistol, and what was more, found himself a prisoner.

What Revello said to the Don he did not know, in the whispered words uttered to him; but certain it was that he saw the Mexican leave the hacienda in safety, while he remained there a prisoner.

He had strong hopes that Lieutenant Waldo would come to his rescue, but this hope was very quickly dispelled when he saw the Don rally his servants by the score, send them to the walls of the hacienda fully armed, call for his cattle-men to mount and ride around the place to look up a foe, while he was sent to the vaults where the Don kept his valuables for safe-keeping, and which were beneath the main part of the building.

Such was the situation after the departure of Revello.

That Don Castile was amazed at what Revello had whispered to him the chief saw, and yet it could not be that he had told him who his prisoner was.

As there was no attack by Officer Waldo and his men, no firing heard without, Bertrando decided that Revello had deserted him, played a daring and cunning game and had gone with the pirates back to the vessel to take command himself.

Of course this could only mean that he, left in the power of his brother, must go to the gallows if the Don so willed.

In the vault where he was temporarily imprisoned Bertrando sat down and waited for the result with the deepest solicitude and impatience.

He heard no firing and felt that he was deserted; but he could only wait and discover what the result would be.

At last a step resounded overhead, a man descended the narrow stairway to the vault, and by the aid of the lantern burning there Bertrando discerned that his visitor was Don Ricardo Castile.

"I am glad you have come, Don Ricardo, for I desire a conversation with you," said the buccaneer chief.

"You will have to talk fast, senor, for I shall send you to-night under a strong guard of my hacienda horsemen to Vera Cruz."

"Indeed, and under what charge do you hold me, senor?"

"I believe you to be an outlaw, who came to my home for the purpose of robbery and murder, for my men report a band of seamen concealed in the chaparral outside the walls."

"I came here to see you, Don Ricardo Castile, and have a talk with you."

"Yet you sought to get my daughter and myself on board your vessel now lying in the lagoon?"

"Do you know what that vessel is?"

"I had supposed it to be the Mexican war cruiser Rattlesnake, under command of Captain Rudolph Revello."

"And now you know that it is not?"

"I believe that it can only be the counterpart of that vessel."

"Name it."

"The Buccaneer Bertrando's craft known as the Ocean Rapier, for they are twin vessels I have heard."

"And do you know the officer who was here with me an hour ago, and who turned traitor to me?"

"Do you know him, may I ask?" said the Don somewhat anxiously.

"I do."

"As whom?"

"A man who is secretly a pirate, though openly an officer of the Mexican Navy."

"It is false!"

"I say that it is true."

"And I repeat that it is utterly false."

"May I ask what the name of the man is whom you defend?"

"I shall give no name to you."

"I am not so particular."

"Well?"

"He came here with me to rob your house, for he is in league with me and has been for some while."

"It is false!"

"He has been my ally at sea, and losing his vessel in a storm came to me to serve in disguise on my craft."

"I repeat that it is an infamous falsehood that you utter."

"We shall see."

"You can give no proof."

"It was he who told me of your home, your riches and the vast amount of plunder I could secure here."

"It was he who told me that he was engaged to your beautiful daughter, and that we should share alike the plunder of the place and the ransom secured from you."

"I do not believe one word you say."

"I mean all that I say, and we came here under his guidance."

"I will never believe it."

"What he changed his mind for, Heaven only knows, unless he was plotting against me, to have me captured and thus gain my vessel for himself, but certainly he turned traitor to me and left me here as your prisoner, while he has returned in safety to my ship."

"As he is first officer to my brig he will be obeyed and become known as the Buccaneer Chief, which will enable him to secure certain riches, when he will come to wed your daughter."

"Never! he will never be guilty of what you charge against him."

"I refer to Rudolph Revello, Don Ricardo."

"As I do, a captain in the navy of Mexico, and a noble man and true."

"Well, I have told you just what you may expect, and now that he has turned traitor to me you may expect him to be treacherous toward you and your daughter as well."

"I can never believe it; but you are Bertrando the Buccaneer?"

"I am."

"You admit it with remarkable frankness."

"Why not?"

"Have you no shame, no fear of your life?"

"I am past the day of all shame long ago, Don Ricardo, and as for fear, what have I to fear?"

"The gallows for your crimes!"

"I am not the man to die on the gallows."

"I shall deliver you over to the Mexican Junta for trial for piracy upon the high seas, and landing on the coast to rob my home."

"You will do such no thing, Don Ricardo Castile."

"You defy me?"

"I do."

"Here comes my guard now to take you to Vera Cruz."

"Dismiss that guard and hear what I have to say," was the command rather than the request of Bertrando, the Buccaneer.

CHAPTER XXX. THE DON SURPRISED.

THERE was something in the manner of the buccaneer chief so impressive that Don Ricardo hesitated and gazed fixedly at him.

"Send your guard away, or at least order them to await without until I have a talk with you."

"What have you to say?"

"Do as I tell you."

"What you have to say let it be in the presence of the guard."

"No, for you would regret it."

"Do as I tell you, Don Ricardo."

The Don hesitated, then stepped up the stone stairway and told the men waiting there to await in the Plaza until he called them.

Then he returned to the vault.

The prisoner stood there ironed to a bolt in the wall and heavily manacled, though he did not seem to be inconvenienced by his situation or the weight of the manacles.

"Now, senor, what have you to say?"

"Don Ricardo Castile is noted for his hospitality and I am his guest though a prisoner."

"This place is dark, close and loathsome, while above is a most delightful sitting-room with wine and refreshments at hand."

"I am tired and hungry, and I can talk better when refreshed by food and wine, and in pleasant quarters, hence my lips are sealed unless you lead me to the room above."

Don Ricardo looked at his prisoner in amazement, for there was still that certain impressiveness in his manner which he could not but feel.

He would not have his hospitality questioned even by a buccaneer, and intending to send him to Vera Cruz, he thought it but just that he should give him food before his departure.

So he took from his pocket without another word the key of the irons, unfastened the chain from the wall, and said:

"Come with me."

The buccaneer bowed and obeyed, walking slowly, weighted down as he was by his chains.

"Be seated there, senor, and I will order refreshments for you, and then perhaps you will let me know what it is you have to say to me."

"All in good time, Don Ricardo, will I do so," was the answer.

The Don called a servant, ordered refreshments, and placing himself by the side of a table upon which lay a cutlass and pistol, as much as intimated thereby that he would stand no nonsense.

A peon servant brought in a tempting repast, with Mexican liquor and wine, and the prisoner asked to have his hands unmanacled, so that he could eat with comfort.

"I shall do no more than I have, Senor Buccaneer," sternly said Don Ricardo, and as though convinced that he meant what he said, the prisoner began to attack the edibles before him with a relish that showed he fully appreciated good food.

He ate slowly, drank the Don's very good health, and it was only when he saw that his host was growing impatient that he said:

"A very enjoyable meal, Don Ricardo."

"And now for a cigarrito while I talk."

The Don handed him one, and lighting it leisurely with a taper, he leaned back in his chair and said in a complacent tone:

"So you intend to send me to Vera Cruz, to deliver me up to the Junta?"

"I do."

"To be hanged?"

"As you deserve, for your crimes."

"I did promise the one who delivered you into my keeping to hold you here until his return; but I myself am going to Vera Cruz with my daughter, and so will only consider that you are safe when you are in prison there, and there your captor can find you."

"Well, Senor Don Ricardo Castile, let me say to you that I do not intend to go to Vera Cruz to be imprisoned, nor do I intend to remain here, as my treacherous comrade requested until his return."

"You talk boldly for a man in irons."

"I talk knowingly, for I am not going to be hanged."

"Yet you admit to be Bertrando, the Buccaneer?"

"Oh, yes, certainly."

"If you are the one you claim to be, then you must certainly know that his crimes deserve punishment."

"Granted; but I will not hang."

"You have great confidence in yourself."

"No."

"What is it?"

"It is not in myself that I have confidence."

"Who, then?"

"In you."

"I am at a loss to understand you."

"It is in your good heart, your leniency that I have the utmost confidence."

"Pray explain."

"I will do so by relating to you a story."

"A story of what?"

"Of you, of what I know of your goodness of heart."

"Well, granted that my goodness of heart often causes me to do acts that had better remain undone."

"You will do the same again."

"Not in your case."

"Yes, you will."

"You speak as though you expected me to set you free."

"It is just what you will do."

"Never!"

"I say yes."

"And I say never, for you came here to entice by a falsehood my daughter and myself on board your vessel."

"Once there, once in your power, caught in your trap so cleverly set, and you could make what terms with me you wished."

"But your comrade, whom I am sure you do not know, saved me from you, saved my daughter from your vile power, and now you, a prisoner, a pirate, expect me to make terms with you, expect me to set you free."

"Ah, man, you have this time made the saddest mistake of your life in trusting to my clemency."

The Don had spoken warmly, and with the deepest feeling.

He had felt pained that the prisoner would deem him so weak as to spare him.

The manner of Bertrando showed that he did really trust in the clemency of the Don, and somehow he seemed to show no dread of his fate, ironed though he was.

He spoke with an air that was confident, indifferent in fact, and it was this that so puzzled Don Ricardo while it annoyed him.

Known to be a man of great kindness of heart he yet did not wish to believe that it would be thought that he had not the nerve to send a man to deserved punishment, a man who had confessed himself as Bertrando the Buccaneer, a perfect demon of the deep.

"What reason you have, senor, for believing that you may depend upon my mercy I do not comprehend, but certain it is that not one atom of clemency will I show you, not once will I stretch forth my hand to save you from a fate you richly deserve, and which should end your life upon the gallows if you are in fact the man I have just heard you claim to be."

The response of the buccaneer chief was a laugh, followed by the words:

"You promised to hear my story."

"Will you do so?"

"Yes, as I promised."

"Then we shall see what you will do," and again the buccaneer laughed.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BROTHERS.

THE buccaneer poured out another glass of liquor and slowly drank it, the Don watching him the while.

There was a look about his face that was malignant, a smile like the grin of a wild beast that had his prey at his mercy.

"My dear Don," he began as he puffed away at his cigarrito in a lazy way:

"I wish to ask you if you are a Mexican?"

"I am one by adoption."

"But by birth?"

"I am a Spaniard."

"So I thought, and you were heir then to a vast fortune and title?"

"How does this concern you, may I ask?"

"I wish to know if you are the man I seek."

"I am Don Ricardo Castile, once of Spain, now of Mexico."

"You married in Spain, I believe?"

"No!"

The word was uttered vehemently.

Then, in the same drawing way, as though seeking to find out all about his past, the buccaneer continued:

"You are married?"

"My wife died some years ago."

"A Mexican lady?"

"Yes; now say what you wish to me, and be quick, for the past is something I care not to dwell upon."

"You had a brother once?"

The Don started and his face paled.

"Yes, I had a brother."

"Younger than you?"

"No, older."

"He was a soldier?"

"No, an officer of the navy."

"Where is he now?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I wish to know, Don Ricardo."

"He is dead."

"Ahl killed in battle?"

"No; he was lost at sea in a vessel in which he left Spain."

"Why did he leave Spain?"

"See here, senor, what interest do you hold in me and mine to cause you to become so personal in your questions?"

"I hold an interest in that I knew your brother."

"You knew him?" gasped the Don.

"Yes; he was my friend, and I wished to know if all that he told me of himself was true."

"Poor Bertrando, he had a sad life of it, and it was better that death called him away as it did, for, as I said to you, he was lost at sea."

"He was my friend, Don Ricardo, and he told me that he had been cruelly wronged by all whom he had loved."

"Poor Bertrando so believed, for he was under the impression that one loved him who did not."

"The truth was, now you tell me you have heard his story, he loved one who did not love him, but as he was the elder of us two, and heir to the title and estates, the maiden's father forced her to accept my brother's offer."

"He came home to behold the parting of the maiden and myself, for I would not stand in my brother's way, or hers, when so much was at stake."

"He sought to take my life, but the bullet

failed in its aim at me, though I was wounded, while the maiden was slain."

"The result you can surmise, for my brother fled, went to the bad utterly, and a vessel in which he sailed from Spain was lost at sea one night and not a soul survived; all perished, poor, unfortunate Bertrando among the number."

"Now, senor, you know the truth: a truth I have been led into telling you through your words that my brother was your friend."

"The maiden was laid to rest in Spain, while I, broken-hearted at her death by my brother's hand, and by his sad life and end, came to Mexico and found here a wife who was taken from me by death a few years ago."

"So you were my brother's friend, senor?"

The Don had been deeply moved as he spoke.

He had risen from his chair and paced to and fro, his hands behind his back.

In the tall, splendidly formed man before him, with his long hair and beard, he saw no resemblance to the brother who twenty years before had fled from Spain a slender youth of twenty-two or three.

He also believed that his brother was dead, and having deeply loved him, the fact that this stranger was his friend made him feel toward him more kindly in spite of his admitted life of crime.

Bertrando, the Buccaneer, regarded him curiously the while.

His face worked convulsively as he told his story of the maiden who had loved him, Ricardo, while forced to engage herself to the elder brother who was the heir to the title and fortune.

He, too, seemed deeply moved, and he said earnestly:

"Such is your remembrance of your brother that you have no unkind word for him, Don Ricardo?"

"Not one unkind word have I to say against him."

"He is dead, but, oh! had he only waited until he knew all."

"He died with her life upon his conscience, her blood upon his hands, and certainly he was punished enough by such a thought of anguish."

"But, senor, what know you of my brother, and did you as his friend seek to rob me?"

"I knew him well, senor, but I do not believe that he understood the affair between you and Marcelite, or he would—"

"Ahl! you know her name—you called her Marcelite?"

"Yes, I have heard your brother speak it many and many a time."

"And you have remembered it all these years?"

"It is the name of your daughter, I believe?"

"It is, for I named her after the Marcelite I loved, who loved me, alas! and who fell by my brother's hand."

"Ahl, senor, I have carried a very heavy affliction through life."

"And your brother?"

"Ahl! happily for him his life ended, and thus did his sorrows, his conscience, his sufferings."

The buccaneer was silent and for a moment neither spoke.

Then the Don seemed to recall himself from the past and said quickly:

"But why do I talk thus to you, a stranger, an outlaw, and of things that have long been past, of deeds that I deemed forgotten, even though they lived in my own heart and memory?"

"Because I was your brother's friend, Don Ricardo."

"True, yet you are a pirate and he has long lain at the bottom of the blue Mediterranean Sea; but you had a story to tell me, you said?"

"You have told it already, senor."

"I have told it?"

"Yes, senor."

"I have told your story?"

"It is true."

"Pray, explain!"

"You were to hear from me a story."

"That story was to be one of your brother Bertrando Castile."

"Yes."

"You spoke to me of him, you told to me the story that I was to tell you, only different, for he never knew that the maiden Marcelite never loved him and only was to wed him at her father's command."

"He believed that she did love him and was false to him."

"How know you this?"

"I know it, Don Ricardo Castile, because I am your brother, Bertrando Castile, now Bertrando, the Buccaneer," came in deep, earnest tones from the lips of the man in chains.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE DEMAND.

THE announcement of Bertrando of his relationship to Don Ricardo he saw was most startling to him, that he had in reality believed him to be dead.

The Don was staggered as though from a heavy blow, his face turned pallid, and his look

was one of such intense agony that the buccaneer feared he was going to fall from his chair, and said hastily:

"You are ill, let me—"

"No! no! it is such a blow, so cruel, so hard to bear," he gasped.

"To know that I am alive, Ricardo?" sneered the pirate.

"Yes, and to be what you are."

"I could forgive your act toward me, toward her even, committed in a moment of desperation, of jealous rage, but to feel that it was not a lesson to you, to cause you to lead a desperate life, that you should add more crime to your deed of murder, become the man you now are, as Bertrando the Buccaneer, is something I would rather lie down and die than know."

"Yes, because you know that with Bertrando Castile alive you are not the Don and the heir to the Castile estates."

"My God, Bertrando, do not put it like that, do not put my love of gold and rank against your crimes I beg of you."

"Well, I am very much alive, even if I am a prisoner in chains."

"Yes, I know you now and there is no doubt of it."

"It is twenty years and more since we last met, but I know you now, Bertrando."

"It is strange that I did not recognize you before; but then you were a beardless boy of twenty-two, and time has changed you greatly."

"Still it seemed to come over me that you were more to me than other men, and your face, your voice, impressed me, and I was merciful toward you, as you know."

"Ahl, Bertrando, my unfortunate, erring brother, had you but come back to me poor and repentant, a vagabond, I would have gladly welcomed you, and tried to soothe your later years, to take from them all in my power the shadows upon them."

"And as it is?" sneered Bertrando.

"As it is, you come back a self-confessed pirate, bearing a name as a demon of the deep that causes brave men to fear you, and to which is allied, if the half said of you be true, deeds of fiendish cowardice and crime that a monster in heart only could be guilty of."

"But I come back as Don Bertrando Castile, for the title and estates are mine."

"No, you forfeited your title and estates, by act of the king, when you became a murderer, and fled the country, and you are dead to all claims, Bertrando, as you now are."

"Would to Heaven it were different for most, gladly would I yield all to you."

"I have come to claim my title and my estates from you, Ricardo."

"You may claim them, but I will not yield an honorable title and home to a pirate, Bertrando."

The Don was very firm now, and the buccaneer saw that he did not find him the yielding nature he had expected he would.

"I made a mistake," he mused, "not to have come as other than Bertrando the Buccaneer, for then I would have gotten all, I am sure."

Aloud, he said:

"I am Don Bertrando Castile, Ricardo, and no power can keep from me my title and estates."

"Make the claim before the Spanish sovereign and if he decides in your favor I will yield."

"Yes, for you know that he will decide to send me to the gallows."

"Do you not deserve such a fate?"

"What I deserve is not for you to say; but let me tell you that the title you unjustly hold I do not care for, as I could never wear it; but my gold I want and I will have."

"A man who has committed the piracies laid at your door should not be in need of gold."

"But I am in need of gold and I will have it."

"May I ask how you are to get it?"

"You have in the vault below this room a very large sum in gold."

"You are mistaken, for I keep little gold here at the hacienda, as it is too dangerous, living so near the coast as I do, where pirates can land and rob me."

"You must give me an order on your bankers then in Vera Cruz for the sum I demand."

"Are you aware that you are a prisoner?"

"What care I for that, for I am your brother."

"Do not venture too far on that relationship, Bertrando, for though my brother you are yet a pirate."

"Well, what do you intend to do about my estate?"

"It is yours no longer."

"I shall claim it, however."

"Do so before the proper authorities and if decided against me I shall gladly yield."

"You know that I dare not appear to make my claim."

"Then be content with your pirate fortune."

"I will have what is mine that you hold."

"See here, Bertrando, for the gold for myself I care nothing."

"I have not dishonored our name, and I have a daughter whose mother was born of a noble and wealthy family."

"I do not intend that you shall cast dishon-

upon her name and rob her, for rob is the word, of the fortune that is to be hers.

"Now you understand the situation exactly. You are a pirate and a prisoner, without a ship now, and in chains, so it does not seem that you are in a position to demand more of me than one thing."

"And what is that one thing?"

"Your life."

"You will not dare send me to Vera Cruz to be hanged."

"No, I will not let you die at the yard-arm through act of mine, or rather, when it is in my power to save you, and so I shall set you free."

"When you are free, it is my hope that you will leave your guilty career and become a different man; but more I will not do, unless it is to give you some gold, as you may need it to make your escape."

"And I demand a draft on your bankers for every peso of my just inheritance," was the stern demand of the buccaneer chief.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE DON AROUSED.

DON RICARDO was a man of nerve. He had a heart full of gentleness as well, and he had dearly loved his erring brother.

Not even had he felt bitterness toward him when his mad act had killed the woman who was all the world to him.

He had felt deep pain for his crime, rather than hatred, and he had felt glad for his brother's sake when he heard that he had been lost at sea in a wrecked vessel, in which, however, he had not sailed.

The remembrance of the bitter past had been softened by time and his marriage to Marcelite's mother, who had been a devoted wife to him in the years that she had lived.

All of his heart was centered now upon his daughter, and he knew all the happiness he could know in life in his daughter's love and society.

Now came across his path the brother he had believed to be dead, and he came to rob him, to boast of his being a pirate, and, though in chains, to demand of him an inheritance he had forfeited by his crimes.

Driven thus to take a stand for or against, the Don determined not to yield, but to remain firm in his determination not to allow Marcelite to be robbed.

He had fought against Fate in the past, when life held for him no charm, and now he would fight for the daughter in whom his whole life was centered.

"Bertrand," he said at last, and he spoke very seriously:

"The night is waning and you must be far away from here by dawn."

"I will ask you to excuse me a moment."

He left the room, took a lantern and descended into the vault.

There he found a wide leather belt so made as to have a bag of buckskin in the inner side.

Into this he placed Spanish gold pieces, taken from a chest near by until he had completely filled the belt.

Then he filled a large silk purse and returned to the room where his brother sat in silent and angry meditation.

"Bertrand, here is a belt made into a purse and it contains just five thousand pesos in gold."

"You can buckle it around your waist and thus keep it secure, wearing it beneath your garments."

"In this purse are five hundred pesos for immediate needs, for I am acting as though you have no money of your own, which however you doubtless have."

"I shall order one of my best horses saddled for you, and send with you a faithful man to guide you along the coast to some port where you can catch a vessel leaving the country."

"Not a soul here knows you as Bertrand the Buccaneer that you need fear, or I need have dread of their knowing, and I will make what peace I can with the one who left you in my keeping."

"Now, Bertrand, in addition to the gold, I will give you a draft on a New Orleans banking house where I have some money, for ten thousand pesos more, to be drawn only by you in person."

"This money and your liberty are all you need expect from me or will get."

"Now you have my ultimatum."

"You are generous to offer me a pittance out of what is justly my own."

"It's all you shall have."

"You refuse to give me what is my own?"

"I refuse to give to my brother, Bertrand the Buccaneer, the fortune he has forfeited, yes."

"I will yet wring it from you."

"I will be prepared for that."

"If I refuse to accept that gold you now offer?"

"Do not refuse."

"If I do?"

"Then you can receive from me only your life."

"If I refuse that?"

"Then you shall remain here until I hear from the one who left you in my keeping."

"Then it will be for me to hang."

"Alas, yes."

"I, your brother, to be hanged as a pirate."

"So be it, Bertrand, if you care not to accept the terms offered you."

The buccaneer seemed to feel that his brother was in earnest, that he would do no more than he said.

But he urged again by saying:

"It will be very hard for your daughter to have an uncle hanged for piracy."

"Yes, but she is a brave girl and will bear up under it."

"It will be a disgrace."

"Yes, but not through any act of hers or of her father's."

"Then I am to expect no more of you?"

"Not a peso."

"I shall accept your terms," and the man wore a savage look as he uttered the words.

He was by no means moneyless, for he always wore a belt in which were a number of valuable gems, should he lose his vessel, or have to make his escape suddenly.

The money offered by his brother he would not refuse, and yet he said, after having remarked that he would accept the Don's terms:

"I will depart from your hated, accursed roof, Ricardo Castile, but you will see me again some day, and when next I do come it will be to force from you the inheritance that is my own and which you stole from me."

"You will see me when you least expect, and mark my words, you will yet pay to me every peso that is mine, or I will wring your heart with a deeper grief than you felt when Marcelite fell dead in your arms."

"Beware, Bertrand, for you may go too far in your threats."

"You are my brother, but I love my child too dearly to have her suffer, and it is she that you threaten through me."

"Beware, senor!"

The buccaneer winced under the flashing eyes of the Don, who was now aroused almost beyond control, and seeing that it would be dangerous for him to anger him further, while, at least, he was helpless in his irons and could not protect himself, he said:

"Come, release me of my irons and let me leave your hateful presence."

"Yes, I will set you free, but it shall be before my servants, so that I will not be forced to kill you to defend my own life."

"I do not aspire to becoming a Cain, Bertrand, so shall not tempt you to kill me and thus have to take your life."

"I will order your horse, and the guide to be ready, and meanwhile you can strap on your belt and put away your purse."

"My servants will have their orders, so I will not return, and in saying farewell to you, let me urge you to live a different life, for as you are may Heaven have mercy on your soul."

With this the Don left the room.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FREE.

BUCCANEER BERTRANDO made a step toward Don Ricardo, as though either to detain him in the room, or to strike him with his manacles. But the Don looked not back and left the room hastily.

"Curses! I did wrong to get into this trap," growled the pirate.

"But my day of reckoning will come, for I must have my inheritance, yes, and I will have it."

Soon after five men entered the room and all of them were armed.

One was prepared for a journey, and he said:

"Senor, I have orders from Don Ricardo to take you with me, and your horse is ready."

"Relieve me of my irons and I am ready."

"The orders of Don Ricardo are that you are not freed of your irons until dawn, when we are upon our way."

"Would he send me away in irons?"

"I am to release you when we get well upon the trail, and when we reach a port to which I am to guide you, I will give you your weapons."

"I refuse to go on such terms."

"Then, senor, I must obey my other orders."

"What are they?"

"To take you to the vault, chain you there, and then leave you."

"So be it; but this is in your master."

"He knows best what he wishes to do, senor, and permit me to say that if you left here without your irons, our people would kill you, for it is known why you came and who you are."

"I will go with you on your conditions," said Bertrand, quickly, alarmed by the manner of the man, and the fear that the hacienda people might carry out his suggestion.

"So be it, senor, and it is supposed that I am to take you to Vera Cruz."

"If I do not do so, through your making your escape, then it will be I that am to blame."

"But I would not advise delay, for the dawn is not very far off, your comrades are surrounded in the chaparral, and they are to be captured and hanged at daybreak."

This news startled Bertrand visibly.

Waldo and his men, then, were in danger, and he had best make his escape as soon as possible.

"The whole country is aroused, senor, and I

alone could guide you away by a trail that would be safe," continued the guide.

"I am ready; let us go at once," eagerly said Bertrand.

The guide led him to the Plaza door, where there were two horses in waiting.

A serape was thrown over the buccaneer to hide his chains, and he was aided to mount.

Then the guide mounted and the two rode out of the hacienda walls in silence.

"We go through the chaparral here, senor, for men are abroad surrounding the buccaneers you brought with you," said the guide.

"I believe they have returned to the vessel."

"No, senor, only the comrade who came to the hacienda with you has done so, he and his slave."

"Ah! and they have gone back to the vessel alone?"

"Yes, senor."

"Why did they not go with my men?"

"They avoided the party in waiting, senor, flanked the chaparral and thus made their way to the lagoon."

"And my men?"

"Are still awaiting orders in the chaparral, unmindful of the fact that they are surrounded and will be hunted to death in a few more hours."

"Curses upon that accursed traitor!" savagely said Bertrand.

A moment after he said quickly:

"See here, senor, are you a rich man?"

"I am chief of the Don's cattlemen, senor, and so am but a poor man."

"I can make you rich."

"I would not accept blood-stained gold."

"Bah! let me tell you that I have a belt of gold given me by your master, and I will give it to you entire if you will conduct me to the lagoon and place me on board my vessel."

"I believe that the vessel has sailed, senor; but had it not, I would not do as you wish."

"Why?"

"I would obey my master's orders."

"Bah! be a fool and lose a fortune?"

"Yes, senor."

"It will be a very large fortune for such as you, that I will give you."

"I must obey my master's orders, senor, gladly as I would like to be rich."

"The Don need not know that you put me upon my vessel."

"I have orders to take you to a port some leagues down the coast."

"I have a brother there who is an innkeeper, and he is to take you in charge and secure your passage out of the country, senor."

"Those are my orders, senor, from Don Ricardo."

"And by simply taking me to my brig you can enrich yourself, for I will give you five times the sum I promised, and more, a handsome purse of gold, to buy absolution with, for using gold gained by piracy."

"I am but a poor man, as I told you, senor, but you cannot tempt me, never! never!"

The buccaneer cursed the honest man roundly for his honesty, and rode on in silence.

The trail taken by the guide flanked the head of the lagoon, and was through the grazing lands of the Don's cattle.

After several hours' ride, dawn came, and they halted on a hill commanding a view up and down the coast.

"See, senor, yonder is the lagoon, and no vessel is there."

"And yonder she is, far off upon the sea—yes, and there are two vessels-of-war rounding that point of land."

"They are Spaniards, senor, I think, and are doubtless looking for your vessel."

"You were fortunate in leaving the hacienda when you did."

Bertrand gave a sigh of relief at his escape, and was only too anxious to press on once more along the coast.

"I will free you of your irons here, senor, for I have no fear of your escape, and if you attempt it I have my orders."

"Given you by the Don?"

"Yes, senor."

"What are they?"

"To kill you."

"And you would do so?"

"I would only do so in case you attempted to escape me, disobey the Don's orders and remain in Mexico."

"I am to see you into my brother's keeping, he is to see you out of Mexico, and if you attempt other plans I am to kill you, senor, so do not force me to do so, as I do not wish your life on my hands."

Bertrand saw that his guide was not a man to trifle with, and so he held out his hands, and was soon free of his irons.

At noon the two rode into a small port on the coast, and that night Bertrand sailed from Mexico a free man, in a vessel bound for Yucatan.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE DON AND HIS DAUGHTER.

WHEN the Don left his pirate brother in the sitting-room, his first duty was to select the man

in whose sagacity he could rely as well as on his honor.

That the guide did not disappoint him has been seen.

Until the buccaneer left the hacienda, the Don stood at a window in his darkened room regarding him.

Then, when the forms of the departing horsemen disappeared in the gloom of night, he uttered a groan of anguish and staggered back into the room where he had held his conversation with the buccaneer.

As he entered the room, he started back in almost horror, for there, in the recesses of a curtained alcove, he beheld the form of his daughter.

A wondrously beautiful girl was the Senorita Marcelite, even though now her face was deathly pale.

She possessed a form of exquisite grace, and her eyes were large, dreamy and full of expression.

She was dressed in the costume of the country, and a callous heart, indeed, must the man have possessed, who would not be won by her beauty and fascination of manner.

And this was the beautiful being who was pledged to Rudolph Revello, the Mexican captain, a man then in command of a pirate craft, a man who had left his wife chained to the mast of his vessel, to go down with the wreck into the depths of the Gulf.

"Marcelite!" It was all that Don Ricardo could say, and he sunk into the nearest chair, the very one in which the buccaneer had been seated.

Had she heard all that had passed between him and that guilty brother?

Or had she come to the room just now?

He had not the power of speech to ask the question, but sat like one who had been struck a stunning blow.

And to his side glided Marcelite, and taking his hand she said softly:

"Come, father, you must not sit here. I do not wish to see you sit here; any other seat but this one."

These words told him that she had heard all. He sprang from the chair as though stung by a serpent and sunk into the one he had always occupied.

"My child, you have heard—"

"All, father."

"You know him then as—"

"You brother, my uncle."

"He was, as I believed, dead."

"It had been better for him had he been dead, father."

"My brother, Bertrando the Buccaneer?"

"And my uncle?"

"Ah, my child, do you blame me?"

"Blame you, father?"

"Yes, Marcelite."

"How can you ask such a question?"

"I know now, what you have always kept from me, that my mother was not your first love."

"I know now, father, that the one you loved, who loved you, was pledged to him, my uncle, Bertrando the Buccaneer, and that she fell by his hand, dying in your arms."

"That is the scar you received from his bullet, there on your head, and which you would never tell me about."

"I know all now, father, and that your life has been as noble, as honorable, as his has been wicked and heinous."

"I know, father, that you have acted bravely and well in what you have done this night."

"Then you do not blame me for not giving up the estates?"

"They are yours, not his, for he could not claim them in law, or before his king."

"He has forfeited all rights, my father."

"So I feel, my child."

"And you were generous to supply him with gold, more generous to give him his freedom."

"I could not see him die on the gallows, Marcelite, richly as he deserves it."

"No, yet it will be his fate in the end, for how can it be otherwise?"

"He came here to rob you, and he was thwarted, and how strangely."

"Yes, so strangely that I cannot understand it, father."

"What do you mean?"

"He accused the one who was his comrade, the one who came here with him, of treachery?"

"And that one protected you, saved me, for Bertrando wished to get both of us into his power."

"True, true."

"But what was he doing as the comrade of Bertrando, the Buccaneer?"

"Ah, my child, what can you mean?" and the Don was really alarmed now.

"I mean, father, that I know who his comrade was."

"Had you known?"

"Yes, for though you did not recognize him I did."

"You recognized—"

"Rudolph Revello, Captain in the Mexican

Navy, as the comrade of Bertrando, the Buccaneer."

"He came here in disguise, and yet the buccaneer knew that he was disguised."

"He came here with Bertrando for a purpose, and only when the buccaneer sought to carry us aboard the pirate craft, did he resent it and protect us."

"He left here, leaving the buccaneer a prisoner in your hands; but oh, my father! what does it all mean, for I cannot solve the terrible puzzle, cannot realize that the stories I have heard of Captain Revello may after all have truth as a foundation."

"Father, tell me, if you can, what it all means, for my heart is so heavy, my life seems crushed out by this blow, that Revello comes here with a sea robber."

That Marcelite felt deeply the recognition, in the disguised comrade of the buccaneer, the man whom she was pledged to become the wife of, showed in her intense manner and haggard face, for suffering had stamped its seal upon every beautiful feature.

"My child," at last, said the Don, smothering his grief in the anguish of his child:

"It was a shock to me to know who the comrade of Bertrando, the Buccaneer was, and yet let us hope that it will all come well in the end."

"But the buccaneer knew him, for remember what he said of Revello?"

"True, and yet Revello made himself known to me, and said all will be well."

"It is a terribly mixed up affair, Marcelite, but do not prejudge Captain Revello, but wait until you know all, until you can hear his explanation."

"He has gone, and he left the buccaneer here."

"He returned to the brig and yet left the men of the buccaneer concealed in the chaparral, and they are still there."

"Wait, my child, and see what the future reveals."

"I will not judge him yet, father, but trust him as before," was the low response, and Marcelite sunk into a chair and covered her face with her hands.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SURROUNDED.

MARCELITE'S trust in Revello was a cause of pleasure to the Don, for he did have confidence in the man himself, and he believed that he was playing a part out of which good would eventually come in being with Bertrando the Buccaneer.

If not, why had he made known who he was, and why he captured the buccaneer.

Of course it seemed strange to have a Mexican naval officer come to his house in company with a buccaneer; but it also looked as though it must be for a purpose for good.

So argued Don Ricardo, and he was glad to see that Marcelite sided with him in his views.

"Come, my dear child, do not give way to your grief, for I have something to ask your advice about," he said, as he saw that Marcelite was grieving with emotion while she sat there with her face buried in her hands, as though to shut out the terrible thoughts that haunted her.

"Well, father, tell me if I can do anything to help you?" she said, with sudden self-control.

"These men came from their vessel in the lagoon?"

"Yes, father."

"The buccaneer chief had with him a force of men who are concealed in the chaparral, so my men report."

"Yes, sir."

"Who brought the vessel into the lagoon I do not know, unless it was Revello, who did it for a purpose."

"He must have had a purpose for good."

"Certainly."

"And yet what he was doing on board the pirate vessel is beyond finding out, father."

"Just now, yes; but wait in patience, and now we will look at the situation as it is."

"I will, father."

"The pirate came into the lagoon, landed a force, which is now within half a mile of the hacienda awaiting orders."

"Yes."

"The two who came here were Bertrando and Revello."

"A buccaneer and naval officer as comrades," and there was sarcasm in Marcelite's voice.

"I believe that they came for a purpose which Revello believed for good, for he seemed surprised at Bertrando's manner and words and then captured him."

"But he left, after making himself known to me, telling me to keep the prisoner until his return."

"He was joined outside the wall, my men say, by an African, and the two went to the lagoon."

"It is supposed, naturally, that they boarded the vessel, for it at once put out to sea, and without taking on board the force of men lying concealed in the chaparral."

"It is all very strange, father."

"Now, this vessel we saw and set down as Revello's brig."

"And yet when night came Captain Revello visited us in company with a pirate."

"Yes; but that is yet to be explained, while the work in hand is to capture that party in the chaparral."

"What have you done about it, father?"

"I have ordered in all my men, and the timber is being surrounded."

"Then, when day dawns, we will demand the surrender of the men."

"I will tell them that their chief is a prisoner, and that their vessel has gone to sea, while if they do not surrender no mercy will be shown them."

"If they surrender?"

"Then we must get at what all this means."

"How, father?"

"They are without doubt under an officer."

"Certainly."

"He can be made to tell by bribes or threats just what the situation is."

"You can at least try it, father."

"Well, now go to your room and get what rest you can, my child, and I will do the same, leaving word to be called just before dawn."

"Then I will ride to the timber, and we will know the result in a very short while."

"Well, father, I know that what you do will be for the best, but do not question this outlaw officer before any one else, regarding Captain Revello's being on board the pirate craft."

"That is a good suggestion, my child, and I am glad you mentioned it."

"Now seek what rest you can."

Marcelite sought her room and threw herself down upon a lounge, but it was not to sleep, for her mind was too excited for sleep to come to her eyelids.

She lay there in deep meditation for several hours, and then rose quickly, as she heard the sound of hoofs upon the Plaza.

Her father was mounting his horse to ride to the chaparral.

Quickly she decided upon her course.

She would go, too.

Her maid was awakened and ordered to go have her horse brought to the door.

Then she put on her riding-habit, armed herself with a pistol, and going to the door, found her horse there held by a peon.

"Minto, get a horse and come with me," she said, and the peon darted away.

The man at the gate let her through with the remark that she would find the Don at the Red Chaparral, and then up dashed Minto hastily and joined her.

She rode rapidly on to the chaparral, and in the gray dawn of day saw a line of men around the timber motte, which was about an acre in size.

Her father was there, and she rode quietly up to his side.

"Why, Marcelite, you here?" he cried, in surprise at seeing her.

"Yes, father, I know not what would be the outcome of all this, so I wished to be near you," she answered.

"The pirates are in the chaparral still, and they can see us surrounding them, so I just sent in a man with a white flag demanding their surrender."

"If they are wise they will fight it out to the bitter end and thus die by bullet instead of rope."

"Yes, my child, you are right."

"How many men are there, father?"

"I do not know."

"And your force?"

"We have half a hundred, nearly all of whom are in full view of the pirates."

"But here comes my man."

The man sent in by Don Ricardo was now seen leaving the chaparral, carrying the white flag he had borne aloft in going toward the pirates.

The Don and Marcelite anxiously awaited his coming, and the former called out as he drew near:

"Well, Diaz, what news bring you?"

"Senor, the officer told me they were men from the Mexican brig-of-war Rattlesnake who had landed to search for pirates, and their vessel had gone to sea without them."

"You know the officers of Captain Revello's vessel, Diaz?"

"Yes, senor."

"Which of his officers was it?"

"Not one, senor, and in my opinion they are pirates themselves."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE PARLEY.

THE answer of Diaz was not a surprise to Don Ricardo, who felt that the pirates, finding themselves entrapped, were playing a bold game.

"Diaz."

"Yes, senor."

"Return and say to the officer in command that I wish to meet him."

"The white flag shall protect him, and I pledge him my word he can return to the chaparral if he deems it best for him to do so after seeing me."

"Yes, señor," answered Diaz, and he went back toward the motte.

There stood Senor Waldo surrounded by his men.

The faces of all of them were anxious, and each man clasped his weapons firmly.

They had waited in vain for the signal calling them to the hacienda to pillage, and the men, all excepting a watch, had lain down to rest and gone to sleep.

When dawn came they saw half a hundred horsemen surrounding the timber and then came Diaz with a flag of truce.

"Something has happened to the captain, and we must brazen it out, for yonder is the brig far out at sea," said Waldo.

So he had told Diaz the story which he had made known to the Don and Marcelite.

When Diaz returned, Senor Waldo had met him, and asked with some eagerness:

"Well, señor, has your master seen those pirates?"

"He thinks he has, señor, and he desires you to come under flag of truce and talk with him."

"But will I be allowed to return?"

"Yes, señor, Don Ricardo Castile is a man of honor and will respect this white flag."

After a talk with several of his men, Waldo said:

"I will accompany you."

The Don saw their approach and as the pirate drew near bowed politely, with the remark:

"I am Don Ricardo Castile, ranchero, señor, so whom have I the honor of addressing?"

"Officer Waldo, Don Ricardo, of the Mexican cruiser Rattlesnake."

"Indeed! is there a cruiser of that name in the Mexican Navy?"

"Yes, señor."

"And may I ask her commander's name?"

"Senor Captain Rudolph Revello."

"Ah! and where is the cruiser now?"

"We landed last night in chase of pirates in boats, who took refuge in a lagoon, and we lost our way and camped until morning, when we discovered our brig far out at sea—there she is, señor."

"Yes, we had discovered her, and yonder is a frigate and schooner-of-war flying the Spanish flag."

The start of Waldo did not escape the Don, and he asked:

"Why has your vessel run away from you?"

"Fearing those two cruisers, doubtless, señor."

"Who landed with you last night, señor?"

"No one, señor, other than my men."

"Father, why not end this at once by saying that you made Bertrando the Buccaneer prisoner last night, and that these men are from his vessel, and came here to rob your home?" said Marcelite.

Waldo started again at this, but quickly replied:

"You captured Bertrando the Buccaneer, señor?"

"Yes."

"Then you will deliver him up to me of course, that I may take him on board the brig when she returns for us?"

"No."

"And why not, may I ask, señor?"

"I will instead, ask your surrender without a combat that will force you to do so."

"My surrender, señor?" asked Waldo with well assumed surprise.

"Yes, for you came here with your chief, Bertrando, to rob my house."

"Receiving no signal from him to come to his aid, you remained where you were, and your vessel will not return, for she sailed without you."

"Ha! did you capture also one who was with the chief?" eagerly asked Waldo, thrown off his guard.

"I did not, for he returned to the vessel."

"Then he is the traitor that led Captain Bertrando into a trap and now commands the vessel."

"I warned Bertrando of that man, but he would not heed, and now he is a prisoner, we are here without a ship and Revello is now the chief."

"Ah! Revello did you say?" cried Marcelite eagerly.

"Yes, señorita, Rudolph Revello, captain of the Rattlesnake brig-of-war in the Mexican Navy."

"And how can it be that a Mexican naval officer is on board a pirate?" sarcastically asked Marcelite, while Don Ricardo left the questioning to her, confident that she would elude out of the man some information which he could not.

Unmindful that a trap was set for him to fall into, and which, had he suspected the motive, he would have steered clear of, Waldo responded:

"I might as well admit that I am from the brig Ocean Rapier, for I see that she is returning now and we will soon return to her."

"But I asked you how it was that a Mexican captain was on a pirate vessel and not as a prisoner?" persisted Marcelite.

"We picked him up at sea in an open boat, he and a negro slave."

"They were half starved to death, and he

said first that he was Don Ricardo Castile, a ranchero."

"Ah! he claimed my name!" said the Don, angrily, while Marcelite remarked:

"Perhaps for some good motive, father."

"But how did you know that he was not Don Ricardo?"

"Because I knew him to be Captain Revello and so told the chief."

"Well?"

"He, the chief, then had a talk with him before me and I denounced him as Revello when he admitted who he was."

"The chief decided to give him a chance for his life if he would lead him here to your home, Don Ricardo, and Revello consented if he would make him an officer."

"This was done only by his offering to fight our first officer, a desperate fellow with the sword; but he killed officer Cortez and so stepped into his shoes."

"From that day he and the chief became sworn friends, for Bertrando would not listen to my warnings against him, that he intended to play him false."

"So the brig headed for this place, and we came ashore last night and the rest you know, for they left me, the chief, Revello and the negro to go to the hacienda."

"Ah! the brig is signaling the Spanish frigate."

"Yes, and see, the frigate answers."

"There, the brig puts away southward and the two Spanish vessels head along the coast," said the Don.

This caused Waldo to look very anxious, and he said:

"I cannot understand it."

"Nor I."

"Ah! he is playing honest to the Spaniards, I guess," suddenly said Waldo.

"He has certainly deceived them."

"Yes, and now you see a pirate craft sailing away under a man who has played traitor to Bertrando, leaving him here to hang, and to us who will have to fight for our lives."

"That would be useless, for I have you surrounded by a larger force than you command."

"Well, señor, I am not one to yield without a struggle, so I will return to my men and do as I deem best."

"If we fall, we will at least have made a brave fight of it," and Waldo turned upon his heel and walked back toward the motte where his men were most anxiously awaiting his return.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE RETREAT.

"WELL, father, what do you think now?" asked Marcelite, when Waldo was out of sight.

"It is all a mystery to me, Marcelite."

"Yes, and Captain Revello is either playing some sharp game for the capture of the buccaneer vessel or he is—"

"What, my child?"

"A pirate himself."

"I can not believe the latter of him."

"It would not seem so, and that man told us how he had been picked up at sea in an open boat alone with that queer slave of his."

"Yes, and he said his vessel had been wrecked, my child."

"Yes, father, and fought the pirate officer for his place."

"And claimed to be me."

"I confess I do not understand it, for he led the buccaneer chief here, that is certain."

"Yet why did he return to the brig with the negro and leave those men there in the motte?"

"And just now exchange signals with the Spanish cruiser, which certainly did not seem to regard him as a pirate?"

None of these questions could either the Don or Senorita Marcelite answer with satisfaction to themselves, so they turned their gaze upon the vessels.

The buccaneer brig was flying along seaward under a pressure of sail while the two cruisers were keeping close in toward the coast.

"Well, Marcelite, I must now see if these men are going to fight or surrender."

"You will attack them, father?"

"Certainly; so you withdraw out of range, as I shall give the signal to advance."

"No, father, I shall remain by your side."

Argument to the contrary was useless, for the plucky girl would do as she said, and so Don Ricardo gave the order to Diaz to move the men toward the timber.

Just as he did so the pirates marched out of the motte in close order, their guns ready, and at a swift pace headed for the lagoon.

"Ha! they expect to find boats there, and thus escape us."

"They must be headed off, Diaz."

"Yes, señor," and Diaz pressed forward with a cry to the men.

The Don shouted his order to his men to encircle around the pirates, and open fire upon them.

"There are just forty-one of them, father!" cried Marcelite, quickly counting them.

"Yes, but I believe we can defeat them."

The horsemen now dashed out of cover and

rode down upon the pirates, who opened fire, yet still moved on at a quick march.

A horse went down here and there, and a man or two fell from his saddle.

This enraged the *vagueros*, and they returned the fire, and with deadly effect.

They encircled the band like Comanches, and a marching fire was kept up.

Moving as they were, and not accustomed to that mode of fighting, the damage done by the pirates was not half so severe as what they suffered from the fire of the horsemen.

But they left their dead and wounded where they fell, showing heartlessness by deserting their comrades who were rendered incapable of doing further work.

But on they marched, steadily and swiftly, Waldo leading and making a brave fight of it.

"The hacienda boats are in the lagoon, somewhere, men, so reach them and we are safe," cried Waldo.

And on they went, up hill and down dale, while the horsemen circled about them like Indians, still keeping up a hot fire.

The trail of the pirates was marked by dead and badly wounded men, and the *vagueros* removed their dead and wounded as quickly as they fell.

Then on marched the buccaneers, drawing nearer and nearer to the lagoon.

"Make a stand now, men, on this side, and beat them back," cried Don Ricardo, who, accompanied by Marcelite, who would not leave his side, and who was an interested spectator of the marching fight, had ridden to the front on the trail the buccaneers were following to the lagoon.

The men near the Don obeyed, and stood at bay.

But the pirates marched unflinchingly on, and their well-directed fire and a charge broke the line of horsemen, causing them to fall back rapidly.

A cheer from the pirates at their success was answered by the clear voice of Marcelite calling to her father, who was a few rods away rallying his men.

"Well, my child?" cried the Don.

"Call off a dozen of your men, and send them to the lagoon to get the boats out of the way for those pirates will reach the shore."

"Marcelite, you are a born commander, and I will deputize you to do the work, so take what men you wish."

"No, father; I shall remain by our side, so let Diaz go."

Diaz was called and told what was expected of him, and he quickly drew off a few men and rode with all speed to the lagoon, for the buccaneers had already traversed half the distance to it.

Away they sped and the lugger, several sailboats and a barge were quickly gotten out of reach, sail set on the larger one and the others taken in tow, for the men were sailors as well as horsemen.

Hardly had the boats gotten well under way when the retreating horsemen appeared over the hill falling back, and then came the buccaneers who gave a ringing cheer as they beheld the lagoon.

But their cheer was turned to cries of dismay when they beheld the boats, which Waldo had marked in the lagoon when they had landed at night, far out of their reach upon the waters.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE SURRENDER.

The buccaneers were disheartened, when they saw that the boats were beyond their reach.

There was wind enough for the lugger to stand out to sea towing the boats, so that to capture them was impossible.

The men looked at Officer Waldo, and he knew not what to say, though he held on with the party toward the lagoon.

He moved too toward a wooded point with open land around it where he would have shelter for his men if it came to a pitched battle.

The Don now felt sure of the band, and so ordered his men off, to protect them all in his power.

"They cannot leave that point unless they swim out to sea or beat us off, and we can keep them besieged and starve them into surrender," he said.

Then he added to Diaz, that he wished his men to keep well out of range and not sacrifice themselves.

These orders were passed along among the horsemen, and the men took position in crescent shape about the wooded point, which the pirates at last reached with the loss of just half their men.

"But for you, Marcelite, they would have gained a victory over us in securing the boats, and escaping to sea."

"You have a wise head on your shoulders," said the Don.

"Thanks, father, for the compliment; but what are they to do now?"

"Wait until they are starved out."

If they knew that there was a fishing hamlet some leagues further down the coast they could reach it, for they could keep in the sea

where the nature of the ground prevents horsemen from going near them."

"You are right again, my child."

"I declare you would make a splendid commander; but the buccaneers feel now that they are hemmed in and must soon surrender."

"They might hold out a day or two, and it is best to hurry them into a surrender, father."

"Certainly, if it can be done."

"It can be."

"How?"

"Send half of your men with all speed around the head of the lagoon, let them hail the lugger, board her and she can, with this breeze stand back and forth to the point, her crew protected by her high, thick bulwarks, while they can pour in a hot fire."

"Marcelite, my child, you are a wonder."

"Ho, Diaz."

"Yes, senor."

"The Senorita Marcelite has suggested a plan which you are to carry out, while I remain here with the balance of the men," and the Don explained fully Marcelite's plan.

"If we bag them, senorita, and we surely will, the credit will be to you," said Diaz as he hastened away.

Watching from their position of advantage the Don and Marcelite saw Diaz and his men soon riding on the other shore of the lagoon near the sea.

The lugger was signaled and returned with the boats in tow, and then the men on horseback were seen to dismount and go on board.

The other boats were left in charge of one of the men, all ready to put out to sea, and the lugger set sail for the point where the buccaneers were.

The latter were not long in realizing what was intended, and quickly sought places of cover from the water side.

But to get cover they exposed themselves on the land side, and the Don and his men opened a hot fire upon them.

This put them between two fires when the lugger stood close in, and the pirates were seen to be very much demoralized.

Then Waldo was seen to spring forward and rush for the water's edge.

He was followed by his men and they plunged into the lagoon just as the lugger was wearing around to go about, having stood close inshore.

"My God! they will board her by swimming and carry her," cried the Don.

The lugger was lubberly and slow in going about, and as the wind was light she was so long in going about that Waldo saw his chance to swim out and board her.

He saw that he had more men than had Diaz, and at close quarters he knew what the pirates could do.

Could they reach the lugger before she could go about and get headway he could carry her easily, knife in hand.

If not, he could swim back to the point and hold the position as before.

To do this he left a few men with the rifles of all, loaded to cover their bold move and drive back the horsemen should they charge.

"Oh, father, rush your men upon them now!" cried Marcelite, and the Don, who had decided to do this very thing, called to his men to mount and follow him.

In an instant Marcelite was by his side, and persuasion or pleading would not send her back.

But just as the men were moving to the charge, they saw that Diaz had not been taken by surprise, for he was picking off the swimming pirates, who were driven back toward the point.

At the same moment the horsemen made a rush, and quickly came the cry of surrender from the buccaneers, who were not a moment too soon, for the blood of the Mexicans was up and they meant to kill.

"Spare those who cry for mercy!" shouted the Don, and he dashed into the timber, Marcelite by his side.

There stood the remnant of the band, who had fought so bravely in a bad cause, and all were humble now.

"Where is your commander?" asked the Don.

"The Senor Waldo is at the bottom of the lagoon."

"He was shot when his hand was upon the lugger," said one of the men.

"Well, he was a brave fellow and deserved to die in a better cause," was Marcelite's response.

CHAPTER XL.

THE MISSING LUGGER.

THE buccaneers who surrendered were but ten in number, while there were half a dozen wounded ones, who had fallen in the retreat to the lagoon.

"That young officer was a dashing fellow, Marcelite, and would have made a gallant man to have been in an honorable service."

"I am really sorry he was killed," said the Don, when he and his daughter had returned to the hacienda to breakfast.

"It is better as it is for him, father, as he would surely have hanged, for he was self-confessed as an officer under Bertrando."

"True, he would have been hanged, and I hate to see a brave man die a dishonorable death."

"But are you sure he was killed, father?"

"So his men said."

"He was shot just as he put his hand on the lugger."

"And what will you do with the prisoners, father?"

"Put them on the lugger so that Diaz can run them to Vera Cruz to-morrow, for by that time I will have the cargo to send down there ready," answered the Don, who was wont to send the lugger to Vera Cruz every couple of weeks.

The buccaneers were accordingly put in the hold of the lugger, the wounded ones also being taken on board, and the crew of three men, a mate and two seamen, went on board.

The next day when her cargo was ready Diaz was to go with her to Vera Cruz and surrender the prisoners to the Junta with a report from Don Ricardo that the pirates under Bertrando had landed to rob his hacienda, and had been thwarted.

More the Don did not care to say.

The wounded men of the ranch were tenderly cared for and the dead, pirates and ranchmen, were decently buried during the day.

That night Marcelite sat at her window in deep meditation.

It commanded a view of the lagoon and the Gulf in the distance, and she was gazing upon the rising moon.

It was late and yet she could not sleep.

She was thinking over the past few hours, and her heart was with her sailor lover upon the sea.

Suddenly she started, for the moonlight revealed a white object in the lagoon.

It could only be a sail, and why was it there, for the lugger was not to depart until the next day.

The sail was not entering the lagoon from the Gulf, but moving out of it.

Quickly she sprang for the glass she always kept in her room.

One look through it and she recognized the lugger.

It was under sail and standing out to sea.

She at once thought that her father had decided to send the lugger sooner than he had intended.

But then she recalled that she had been in the room with her father a couple of hours before, when he told Diaz that he wished him to sail at sunset the following day.

"There is something mysterious in the sailing of that lugger now that I must find out," she said.

Hastily she left the room and sought her father.

He was not in his bed-chamber, but she found him in the sitting-room, pacing to and fro, his hands behind his back.

He, too, could not sleep, it seemed.

He started at sight of her, and asked anxiously:

"What is it, my child?"

"Father, have you sent the lugger to sea?"

"No, my child; certainly not."

"Then there is something wrong, for she is standing out by the lagoon now."

"I saw her distinctly with my glass when the moon rose and cast its light directly upon her white sails."

"There is something wrong in this," cried the Don, and at once the servants were aroused, the ranchmen were called in, and mounting his horse, Don Ricardo, escorted by a number of his men, rode rapidly toward the lagoon.

By his side was Marcelite, for she had pleaded no to be left alone at the hacienda.

A rapid gallop soon brought the party to where a view of the Gulf was had, and there was visible the lugger, half a league off shore.

She was crowded with canvas now, and was standing on a course that would carry her far out to sea.

"I cannot understand it," the Don said.

"I can."

"Well, Marcelite?"

"Some of those pirates escaped in some mysterious way, seized the lugger and are gone."

"Yes, there were but three of my men on board to-night, and they have been overpowered by the buccaneers, or bribed."

"Or perhaps, as I said, some of the pirates escaped and boarding the lugger to-night, for she lay against the shore, freed their comrades."

"We may make some discovery at the shore," responded the Don, and they dashed into the lagoon.

There upon the bank they found a man writhing in pain and groaning.

"It is Felipe, the lugger's master," cried Diaz as he threw himself from his horse and bent over the suffering man.

"Ah, my poor Felipe, what has happened?" the Don said tenderly, having also dismounted.

"It was that young devil of a pirate officer, senor."

"Hail was he not killed to-day?"

"Not he, senor; but he hung on in some way to the lugger astern with several of his men, and to-night they boarded us."

"They were upon us with their knives before

we could resist, me and my two mates, and while the boys were killed I got this in my side, and it's my death wound," and he placed his hand upon a knife-thrust in his side.

"I hope it is not so bad as you think, good Felipe; but I will have you taken at once to the hacienda and we will do all in our power to save you."

"But are you sure it was the pirate officer?"

"Ah yes, senor, for I saw him in the fight to-day and marked him well."

"He is a devil, senor, and I heard him say to the prisoners, his men:

"Now, lads, I will set you free, for they did not kill me as they supposed."

"I am all right, and as the lugger is provisioned we will soon be at sea and safe."

"Now, lads, to strip you of your irons."

"That is what he said, senor, and they soon had the lugger flying out to sea."

"Ah, senor, I fear I am done for."

"No, Felipe, I believe we can save you," and the Don started the men to the hacienda with the wounded man, while he and Marcelite followed slowly discussing the escape of Waldo and his comrades who were held in irons on board the lugger.

CHAPTER XLI.

STRANGELY MET.

THE story of the mate of the lugger was a correct one, for the daring young pirate officer, Waldo, had managed to save himself by diving, and coming up under the stern of the lugger.

When he saw that it would be impossible to carry the craft, he called to several of the men about him to save themselves as best they could.

Three others besides himself managed to cling to the lugger, under her stern, where, fortunately for them, they were not locked for.

To his delight Waldo saw that the men were to be kept on board the lugger, and when night came on, after a long clinging to the sides of the craft, they went up over the bulwarks, their knives in their teeth, and in an instant, almost, held possession of the deck.

Felipe was tossed overboard with the others of the lugger's crew, for it was supposed that he had received his death wound.

Then the anchor was gotten up, sail was set, and the lugger stood out to sea.

The next morning, to the dismay of all, for the buccaneer prisoners had been freed of their irons, it was discovered that there was not a drop of water on board.

The casks had not been filled, that duty being left by Felipe until the last.

The lugger was well out to sea, and the wounded men on board began to plead for water.

There was a sail in sight, and so Waldo decided to hide all but a couple of his men, and pretending to be a coaster, run down and ask for water, saying that his casks had sprung a leak in the night, and had drained out every drop of the precious fluid.

"We can run alongside in this calm sea and light wind, lads, and carry the craft by boarding, now I think of it, and it will be best, for yonder schooner is not a bad vessel, and we may be able to secure considerable booty, after all."

Such was the plan formed by Waldo for the capture of the coaster, and it was carried out successfully, without the loss of any of his men.

The men in manacles in the lugger's hold had been released the day before, and armed with knives and with whatever weapons they had brought with them or found there, they would make a very formidable band to withstand.

Then, too, they were desperate men and saw hope before them if they were successful, the gallows if they failed.

So the flags of the lugger were set to mark distress on board and she was steered to head the vessel off.

The wind was light, and Waldo and two others were all there were on deck.

Of course, he expected the stranger would be shy of him, dreading lagoon pirates, but the coaster showed no fear and the lugger was soon within hail.

The men in the cabin and hold, fifteen of them all told, stood ready to come out at Waldo's call.

Thus the lugger neared the cutter and Waldo hailed.

He told the one who answered that it was a ranch lugger and out of water, so they wished to get a cask if it could be spared them.

Sailors are always generous and willing to help their mates, so the coaster was brought to, and the lugger's skipper was told to run alongside.

"By Heavens, men, but there stands Captain Bertrando on the deck of that craft," whispered Waldo, and the men could hardly refrain a cheer at his words.

It was true, for Bertrando, the Buccancer, was standing near the wheelman of the coaster.

It was the very craft on which Bertrando had taken passage the day before, and thus he was to meet some of his crew once more.

"There are but seven men visible on the

craft, lads, besides Captain Bertrando, so we double them in number.

"Stand ready to come at my call," whispered Waldo, as he passed the cabin and open hatch forward.

Then came the order:
"Steady at the wheel there—now lay her along-side!"

The helmsman obeyed the order and as the lugger drifted alongside the coaster, Waldo shouted:

"Now, lads, follow me to the rescue of our chief!"

Captain Bertrando was almost as much surprised at the sight of Waldo and his men, boarding as they did, as was the skipper and crew of the little vessel.

There was but a short resistance and the red work was over, for all who tried to save the vessel quickly met death at the hands of the desperate pirates, Captain Bertrando also joining with his men in the attack.

In five minutes of time the coaster was in the hands of Waldo, who now approached his chief.

"Well, Waldo, my brave friend, what does this mean?" cried Bertrando as he grasped the hand of the officer who had so pluckily carried out his plan to capture the coaster.

"It is a long story, Senor Chief, which I will tell you when I have gotten our wounded comrades on board this craft, removed what valuables the lugger may have on board and then scuttled her."

"But you are in command, chief."

"No, bold command until I know all."

"Then we will decide what is best to be done," answered Bertrando.

Waldo quickly attended to the duties in hand, removed the wounded pirates to the schooner, along with a few things of value on the lugger and then the latter craft was scuttled and set adrift.

"Now, Senor Chief, I have to report for orders," said Waldo as he came aft.

"Well, put the schooner on her course again for Havana, as she was bound to that port and has a valuable cargo on board, which I can play skipper and dispose of there."

"Then we can ship a cargo for Vera Cruz, for I desire to visit that port for various reasons."

"You have left none of the schooner's crew alive, I hope?"

"Not one, Senor Chief, for dead men never tell tales."

"True, and it is well; but how many men have you?"

"Fifteen of us for duty, Senor Chief, though several of us are slightly wounded."

"Then there are five below severely wounded."

"Well, see to them, and then report to me here, for we will divide the men into watches."

This was done, and then Waldo, having selected a man as second mate, followed the chief into the schooner's cabin to have a talk with him, after their unexpected and strange meeting at sea.

CHAPTER XLII.

BERTRANDO AT THE HELM.

THE craft which had been so boldly and murderously seized by Waldo and his men, was a Mexican schooner of a hundred tons burden, trading generally along the coast of Mexico, but willing to seek a port elsewhere if there was money in it for the captain.

She had shipped a cargo for Havana, and the skipper was very glad to have a passenger who would pay him liberally, for so had the innkeeper told him of Captain Bertrando.

That the voyage would be interrupted, as it was, the buccaneer chief had never dreamed, and he was in a very moody spirit when the lugger was sighted.

There were in the schooner besides the master, a mate, five seamen and a cook, and not a show of mercy had been given to one of them by the desperate buccaneers.

Captain Bertrando had grumbled at the skipper for not going on, and stopping to heed a call from the lugger, for he was anxious to get well away on his voyage.

Now when he was seated in the cabin of the craft, with Waldo opposite to him, and a bottle of *aguardiente* between them, Bertrando the buccaneer never looked in a more cheerful mood.

"My dear Waldo," he said, "you must tell me all about yourself, and how it is that I find you here at sea when I believed that ere this you had been shot or hanged?"

"I will tell you all, Senor Chief, and I believe you will feel that I was right in warning you against that traitor Revello."

"Right! yes, a thousand times right, and I only wish to find him to settle a score with him which only his death by inches can pay," was the savage response of the buccaneer chief.

"I have a like score to settle with him, Senor Chief, for he deserted me and my men, to be shot, or captured and hanged."

"Do you know where he is now?"

"At sea, senor, in command of your brig and carrying on piracies."

"You are right! He will seek to enrich himself by piracies, and then desert his crew, or

give them over to the hangman, while he sneaks to the hacienda of Don Ricardo Castile and marries his daughter."

"A beautiful girl is she, too, senor; but he shall never have her!"

"No, never!" firmly averred Bertrando.

Then he asked:

"You have seen her?"

"Yes, senor."

"When?"

"Yesterday."

"Where?"

"On my march from the chaparral where you left me to the lagoon."

"Was she there?"

"She was by her father's side in the whole fight, senor."

"The fight?"

"Yes, senor, for we cut our way from the chaparral to the lagoon."

"Indeed?"

"The Don surrounded us at night and in the morning demanded our surrender."

"I refused, and when he told me you were a prisoner and that the brig had gone, I decided to cut my way to the lagoon and capture one of the boats I had seen there."

"A bold stroke, and just like you, Waldo."

"Thanks, Senor Chief, for your praise."

"And so you cut out the lugger?"

"Not then, sir."

"When?"

"You shall know all, senor."

Then Waldo told the story of the retreat under fire, his intention to seize the lugger, and how it had been run off, and then the attempt to board her by swimming out and seizing her when she stood in near shore to fire upon them.

Bertrando praised him again and again for his courage, and when his story was finished grasped him warmly by the hand and said:

"Waldo, I will have command of another vessel soon, yes, of my own beautiful brig, and you go as my first officer."

"Thank you, senor."

"And I shall have in my power that man Revello."

"Yes, senor."

"I will not put him to death, but he shall live a life of torture that will make him pray to die."

"That is just it, Senor Chief, just what he deserves."

"And when I have command of my vessel again I will make another visit to Senor Don Ricardo Castile."

"Ah, yes, senor."

"I will go by night, with my whole force, and the Don and his daughter shall become my prisoners."

"Yes, Senor Chief, yes, and I will ask you for the hand of the beautiful Senorita Castile, for I fell in love with her at sight, in spite of her bitterness to me."

Bertrando was silent a moment and then said in a low, earnest tone:

"Waldo?"

"Yes, chief."

"You shall marry the Senorita Marcelite Castile."

"Oh, senor?"

"You have my promise and I will keep it."

"Thanks, senor; many thanks," bowing low.

"It shall be my revenge on her on account of her name, to marry her to you."

"Am I so bad then, senor, so ill-looking?" asked the crestfallen pirate officer.

"No; it is not that; only that she is a beautiful woman and honorable, and it will humble her to the dust to be forced to wed a buccaneer while it will break her proud father's heart."

"Ah, I see now, Senor Chief, how you mean it; but I was hurt, for women say I am a very handsome man."

"You are, Waldo, you are, and a great devil as well."

"But you deserve all the good I can bestow upon you."

"I thank you, chief," said the now happy Waldo.

After some further conversation together, it was decided that Bertrando should answer the name of the dead master of the schooner, Pedro Velasquez, and run the vessel into the port of Havana.

There the cargo would be quickly disposed of, Bertrando pocketing the proceeds in shares with his crew, and another cargo would be shipped for Vera Cruz.

It was to this latter port that Bertrando was anxious to go, for somehow he believed there he would hear of Revello and his brig.

At any rate, he knew he could go from there in the little schooner with another cargo for New Orleans, where he could cut out a craft suitable for him to go cruising again as a pirate.

If he could not cut out one he had the gold, and gems that would bring enough more, for him to buy one.

Then, too, he could draw the draft given him by his brother, Don Ricardo.

But Bertrando's main object in getting a vessel was to hunt down Revello, and then by making his brother and Marcelite prisoners, to bring the Don to terms.

And so Bertrando was once more at the helm in his cruise of crime upon the seas.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE DOOMED WIFE.

AWAY back to the opening chapters of this story I would have my reader glance, not so long in the lapse of time, but in which time events have crowded upon the mind, making it seem like an age that has passed.

It is upon the night of the tornado that had wrecked the brig Rattlesnake, the scene of a woman in irons, I would now have them glance.

There in the cabin, with manacles upon her slender wrists and ankles, and iron chains holding these to the mast, was the one who had been known in the brig as Ivan, the cabin-boy.

Slender and graceful in form, retiring in nature, no one had suspected the fact that the "boy" really was a woman, until the secret came out in the storm when Rudolph Revello sought the interview that ended with the sentence of the woman to die in chains.

Bravely had she borne the brutal sentence, and bitter had been Revello when he could not force from her a cry for mercy.

The crash had come when the wreck was carried by a wave mightier than the others upon a sunken reef.

In that mad struggle for life, Revello and Topaz had sought safety in the life-boat in which the cunning African had stowed away certain things for future use, for he had known that the boat would float, no matter how much damaged.

The result of that cruise in the life-boat is known, and so it is that we leave Revello and Topaz upon the brig of the buccaneers, and return to the woman in chains upon the wreck.

The first following wave, after the wreck struck, had torn from their hold the pirate crew, and all had been swept mercilessly into the sea.

The shock had been a terrible one, and yet, to the surprise of the woman, it had not torn the wreck apart.

She heard the wild rush of waters over the deck, felt the quivering of the hull as it settled firmly upon its rocky ledge, listened to the shrieks, curses and prayers of the drowning crew, and hurled upon her knees as she had been, she remained thus, praying that Heaven would spare her life for her boy's sake.

"I must live, I must not die, for I have to live to avenge the deed of that man, have to live for my little son," she moaned.

The next wave fell less heavily against the vessel, and the next merely cast a shower of spray heavily upon her.

The sea appeared to be rapidly running down, and it seemed that it had, in that huge wave which had borne the wreck upon its mighty crest, exerted its last dying energies.

Satisfied with the carnival of death in the loss of the crew, the storm's fury rapidly abated.

The wreck yet trembled under the shocks, the waters yet roared about it, and the winds howled overhead; but the storm was surely dying out, and the woman uttered a cry of delight as she realized that it was so.

"Oh, Heaven, I thank Thee! Thou hast answered my prayer, even though I live to avenge!" she cried.

Then it came over her after this flash of joy that the storm was dying out, that the wreck was not going to pieces, that she was yet in irons, manacled hand and foot.

Alone on that wreck, for she felt no one had withstood that rush of waters, she must surely die a lingering death, worse by far than to have gone down quickly beneath the waves had the vessel gone to pieces.

In her despair at the thought she writhed in agony, and overcome, at last, she swooned away, from grief, despair and exhaustion.

She must have been unconscious a long while, she knew, for when she came to consciousness the seas were not pounding away at the hull with mighty blows.

The spray still dashed upon the deck heavily, and yet it was proof to her that the sea was getting over its fury, while the winds had ceased to howl overhead.

The fact that the companionway had been closed by Revello had saved her, for the waters otherwise would have rushed in and drowned her.

The cabin was comparatively dry, and looking about her she suddenly gave a cry of joy, for there at the companionway steps lay a bunch of keys!

She knew them well; they were the keys of Revello, and one of them would unlock her irons.

She started toward them, but the chains checked her progress.

How was she to get that which was beyond her reach, chained as she was?

The thought was maddening; but she nerved herself to calmness and sat down upon the cabin floor to think, her back leaning against the mast, her hands clasped as though in prayer that she might free herself from the chains which held her.

And as she sat there she cast her eyes upward to behold overhead, upon the ceiling of the cabin, a pair of rapiers crossed and fastened by straps.

Instantly she was upon her feet, and in spite of the weight of chains she was leaping up to seize the blades.

Leap after leap she made and each one seemed weaker than the other, for the weapons remained just beyond her reach.

So, tired out with the exertion, she sat down in despair.

But the rest did her good, and nerving herself once more for the task, she made a mighty leap, her hands caught in the hilt of one of the swords, the straps gave way beneath her weight and she fell heavily.

But the rapier was in her hand!

She gave a cry of joy as she grasped it more firmly, and turning, reached out the point for the keys.

She touched them, but she had not the power to draw them along with the slender point of the blade.

Again she tried and again. She would not despair after discovering the keys and the rapiers and securing the latter.

Surely she would not fail now, she thought.

Then it came to her to turn the rapier around, and taking it by the point she pushed the hilt along over the floor until it reached the keys.

It barely did so, for it was a long stretch of the arms and a strain at the chains to get the hilt so as to catch around the keys.

At last she did this, however, and at once slowly but surely drew the keys toward her.

She scarcely dared breathe in the act, for fear she might lose them.

But, slipping her hands up the blade of the rapier she drew the keys nearer and nearer, and then, with a shriek of joy, she clutched them in her hand.

This was joy, was triumph!

She felt utterly prostrated as though from some giant task, and dropping down upon the cabin floor, her head upon the carpet, sunk into a deep sleep.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A WOMAN'S FIGHT FOR LIFE.

THE cabin lamp in the Mexican brig had burned out when the woman awoke from her deep sleep of utter prostration, after she had gotten possession of the keys, and the sun was shining brightly over the sea.

How long she had lain there she did not know or care.

She only knew that the irons still held her fast, and that in her hands she clutched the keys that would give her liberty.

In his mad flight for safety on deck the commander of the vessel, he who had so cruelly sought revenge upon a woman, and that woman his wife, had dropped his keys, and thus she had secured the means of freedom.

She sought the keys that unlocked the manacles about the ankles and gave a cry of joy when she had freed them.

Then working nervously with one hand as well as she could she found a key to fit the irons upon her wrists.

It was a hard task to fit the key and turn it, hampered as she was.

But at last she did so, and dashing the chains to the cabin floor she sprang to her feet and shouted aloud in her joy.

"No, I am not doomed!

"I will not die!

"Just Heaven has spared me to be avenged on you, Revello the Buccaneer, for you are nothing more, even though you float an honest flag above your decks.

"Ha! ha! ha! now I am free!"

She darted about the cabin like a child at play, so glad was she to be free, the thought that being so was not yet safety never entering her mind.

Feeling a gnawing of hunger she went to the caboose forward and soon prepared a breakfast for herself from the food she found there, in the water-tight locker.

This partaken of she felt better and then went on deck.

What a scene was it for a lone woman to gaze upon.

There was the boundless sea about her upon every hand, and the reef upon which the wreck had struck was just level with the waters in a calm at high tide.

It seemed that nowhere else could she behold a break in the sea denoting a reef.

The wreck had driven directly there to its doom and the doom of those on board.

Afar off on the horizon to the northward, as she gazed she beheld a dark line, broken here and there.

"It is land?"

"Land ho!" she shouted and she ran for a glass.

At last she found one in the cabin and leveling it, land was revealed to her vision.

But it was thirty miles and more away and she knew that it must be an island.

Then she sat down and considered that she had been praying to be spared to seek vengeance upon a man whose life could not possibly have been spared while he was on deck.

He too surely must have sunk, as she knew that the boats were all stove, or at least she had heard some one say so.

If she could only find a human being on board now she would be content.

So she roamed over the wreck from stem to stern but not a soul could she find.

All were gone, all torn off by that mighty wave and sent to their doom.

The wreck seemed safe enough there in that calm sea, but a storm or two would surely beat it to pieces.

Provisions enough she had for a long while, but it would never do to risk another storm there.

Yet how was she to escape, for there was not the vestige of a boat there?

The decks had been swept perfectly clean by the waves, the guns even had been torn from their lashings and driven, through the bulwarks, were piled up in heaps upon the rocks aft, for the hull had gone on stern foremost.

But, the woman was not now to be daunted in the face of obstacles and dangers.

Down below she went, and it was not long before she came up again with her arms full of oars.

Pieces of spars followed next; the, the cabin doors were taken from their hinges, after which she brought up a hammer, an ax and nails, with bundles of ropes and canvas.

She noted that the tide was going out, and that it was the very time for her to build her raft.

So she selected a spot upon the reef that was then under water a few inches, and under the lee of the wreck.

Here she laid her heaviest spars, six in number, cutting the longest to the length she wished, and working with the strength of a man and untiringly.

Across those she placed others, and ropes and nails made them fast together.

The oars were stretched across in the center then and secured, and next came the cabin doors.

These were firmly fastened, and so arranged as to make a space to protect her from rough seas, for four of them formed a bulwark.

She worked rapidly, skillfully and well, and when the tide began to come in, she was bringing to the raft several sailors' small chests.

Into these she placed provisions and bedding, and when this was done she looked about for all she might need on her voyage, perhaps for days, perhaps a voyage that might end in death, though she would not allow herself to think the latter.

A cask had been put upon the raft, and then filled with water by bucket.

She had gotten aboard plenty of rope, for when the raft was afloat she could tie it more securely together.

She had braced a spar for a mast, and had a square sail which she could lower across what she called her cabin, if need be.

A barge oar had been made fast as a rudder, and the woman was more than delighted with her work.

If it would only blow fresh, she could drive along with fair speed toward some haven, or across the course of some vessel, she was sure.

If a terrible storm came, she knew that her danger would be great, for though her raft was strong, it might be tossed bottom upward in a wild sea.

It was night now, but she dared not remain until morning, and thus lose valuable time, for there was a fair wind blowing.

So she got from the schooner all that there was left of Revello's valuables, and going on board the raft, shoved off upon the wild waste of waters.

She had lighted two lanterns, and placed one at each end of the spar of her little square sail, so as to be seen by a passing vessel should she fall asleep; and now, taking the long oar for her helm, she set off on the wide sea—to what destiny only the coming hours could tell.

CHAPTER XLV.

GOLETA AHoy!

THE daring woman who had boldly ventured upon her voyage on a raft, held the helm of her frail craft until sleep overtook her, for she was worn out with all that she had passed through.

The raft drifted on under pressure of the wind, and the woman slept on.

Only when the sunlight peered over the door, stood on end as a bulwark, and fell upon her face did she awake.

She did so with a start, and was upon her feet in an instant.

The craft was rocking upon the sea, and white-caps were beginning to show off to windward.

But the raft was firm and the little cabin space the woman had made was dry and comfortable.

Setting her sail again she let the craft drive on while she went to work to prepare her breakfast.

In spite of her peril and hardships, she was downright hungry and ate heartily.

Then she looked all over her raft, tightened ropes here and there, added others, drove more nails in braces and was satisfied that she had a very secure craft.

Of course, she could only go before the

wind upon such a boat, but that course in time must bring her somewhere, she argued, and if a severe storm did not set in she was all right.

So passed the day, the wind increasing until even the raft was going at a five-knot pace.

Now and then a heavy following sea would come tumbling aboard, but the doors were high and thoroughly braced, so that the space within was comfortable.

When night came on the lone woman felt all the desolation and danger of her position.

Time and again she regretted not having remained on the wreck.

Then she was sorry she had not at least waited until the wind would have wafted her to the island she had seen far away from the wreck.

The wind increased and the waves ran high, but she remained at her tiller and held the raft on its way.

The two lanterns were swung at the yard-tips, and she hoped they would be seen by some passing vessel, for she could only see a short distance off.

Thus the night passed away, and an angry night it was.

With the dawn she had hatchet and nails in hand, and ropes were tightened and others added.

She saw that her raft had stood the strain well, but a few more hours of such strain without repairs would cause trouble, she felt confident.

But the gale swept over with the rising of the sun, and yet the wind remained fresh and steady, still driving her along.

The day passed as the other had, and another night came on, the woman getting what sleep she could.

The water and provisions held out well, and the raft was still firm, her cabin still comfortable so that her spirits rose with the passing of time.

Thus another day and night passed, and yet the woman's pluck upheld her.

She knew not where she was going, but it was to the eastward steadily, and she must soon find land or cross the course of ships in the West Indian trade.

Another night settled down, and worn out the woman slept through it.

When she awoke it was with a start.

Voices were ringing in her ears.

Then, not far distant from her was a small, lateen-rigged craft, and her crew were calling to arouse any one who might be upon the raft.

As she sprang to her feet and beheld the vessel, gladly from her lips rung the hail:

"Goleta, ahoy! ahoy!"

"Ahoy! what craft is that, and where bound?" responded a gruff voice.

"All that is left of a wreck, and bound to some haven of safety, sir," responded the woman, who now hastily prepared to play the role of cabin-boy once more.

"Ay, ay, lower away your sail, and I will send a boat aboard of you," came the answer, and the woman waved her tarpaulin again and again around her head.

A boat manned by four sailors now came near, a rope was tossed them and the raft was towed to the side of the goleta.

She was a craft of sixty tons burden, trimly built and had a crew of a dozen men on board, the woman noticed with surprise.

A bronzed-faced man of fifty met her at the gangway, and said in a gruff though not unkind tone:

"Now, my lad, give an account of yourself."

"Ay, ay, sir. I was cabin-boy on the Mexican brig-of-war Rattlesnake and we were wrecked far to the southwest of here."

"I was in the cabin and so escaped, while I believe all others on board were lost."

"We struck on a reef and as the hull did not go to pieces at once I rigged up this raft for a voyage and here I am, sir, owing to you my life."

"Well, you are a plucky fellow to save yourself as you have."

"But you were on a vessel-of-war you say?"

"Yes, sir, the Mexican cruiser Rattlesnake."

"And she has gone to the bottom?"

"Yes, sir."

"With all on board?"

"I am the only one whose escape I can vouch for, captain."

"I am glad of that."

"Sir!"

"I say I am glad the cruiser has gone down, for I hate those kind."

"You hate cruisers, captain?"

"I do."

Ivan, as I must now speak of the woman, looked at the man in surprise.

Then a glance at the crew showed that they were a very hard-looking set of men.

"There is something wrong about this craft," mused Ivan.

Had there still been a lingering doubt in Ivan's mind it was soon dispelled by the words of the captain, a man of fifty with a weather-bronzed face and fearless eyes.

"Yes, I am a wrecker, and the cruisers are always after me."

"It makes no difference whether they are Mexican, American, English or Spanish, all are alike in hunting me down, and only a few weeks ago captured two-thirds of my crew, leaving me short-handed, for I need thirty men in my work."

"I am glad you came aboard, lad, for you appear to be a bright fellow, and can help me greatly."

"Now to get your things off that puny-looking raft of yours, and then we will go on our cruise once more."

"But who built that raft?"

"I did, sir."

"All alone?"

"Certainly, sir, as I told you I know of no one else who was saved from the wreck."

"Well, you are a smart fellow, and a good sailor."

"We will be mates, lad, for I like you."

"Thank you, sir," and Ivan spoke smilingly.

CHAPTER XLVI.

IVAN MAKES A PROPOSITION TO THE WRECKERS.

HAVING been saved from death, the woman decided to accept the situation and turn to with a will.

She desired to conceal the fact that she was not a youth, and was glad to discover that she was not even suspected of being other than she represented herself to be.

She told the rough old wrecker captain that her name was Ivan, and that she had been the cabin-boy of the cruiser, and would be glad to serve him in a like capacity.

It was very evident that he took a fancy to the one he deemed a fearless lad, and told him he should bunk in the cabin and do his cooking for him.

This suited Ivan exactly, and Captain Breeze as he called himself, was glad to have some one to talk to for he talked incessantly.

Thus Ivan was not long in discovering that the man was a wrecker captain, cruising among the Bahamas and setting false lights to lure vessels to destruction.

When he could fill his little vessel with plunder he would run for Havana or New Orleans and sell his cargo of ill-gotten booty.

He was returning from a run to New Orleans when he had sighted the little raft at daylight, driving along over the sea, and thus had Ivan been rescued from peril.

Some weeks before a number of his men had been captured, and Captain Breeze was, as he had told Ivan, very short-handed for a crew.

After a day or two upon the *goleta*, in which he had been kindly treated by the captain and his men, Ivan said to the skipper, as the two sat in the cabin together:

"Captain, I can tell you where you can get more men."

"You can?"

"Yes, sir."

"I don't want men-of-war's men, lad."

"These are men who will suit you."

"Who are they?"

"Mostly Mexicans."

"Where are they?"

"Can I tell you a secret?"

"Yes."

"You will keep it?"

"Yes."

"Well, the craft I sailed on was not altogether a cruiser."

"What?"

"It was not altogether a cruiser."

"How do you mean, lad?"

"Well, she went on cruises, it is true, but her captain picked up a prize now and then for his own pocket."

"Oh!"

"Yes, sir."

"And he picked up prizes quite often, I take it?"

"He did when there was no chance of his being found out."

"What then?"

"Well, he had a place where he kept his plunder."

"I see."

"He was wont to cruise there, and put the booty, and then send after it once or twice a year."

"Yes."

"It was an island."

"Where?"

"About a couple of days' sail from here."

"Do you think you could find it?"

"I know I could."

"And there are men on the island?"

"There are."

"They may have left."

"They cannot."

"Why?"

"There is no boat ever left there for them to leave on if they wish."

"Oh!"

"And then they don't care to leave."

"I see."

"They have their families with them, are well supplied with food by the captain, the island is a pleasant one and having nothing to do they are content."

"How many are there?"

"I suppose you would find nearly a hundred people on the island, counting men, women and children."

"Good! but how many of those are men?"

"You would find fully twenty able-bodied men who are good sailors."

"Better still; but tell me more about this island."

"There is no more to tell."

"It is simply an island retreat of a man who was a pirate under an honest flag?"

"That is about the situation, Captain Breeze."

"Well, my lad, you know them at the island?"

"All of them, captain."

"And would like to go there?"

"Gladly, sir."

"And you think I could equip my craft there?"

"Without doubt, sir, for the people no longer having the cruiser to depend upon would be glad to serve you to have you help them."

"It would be a fine rendezvous for you, captain."

"I'll sail there at once."

"But, captain?"

"Yes, lad?"

"I wish you to make me a promise?"

"Yes, lad?"

"That is that you will in return for my taking you there, grant what I ask of you?"

"Is it a very big grant, lad?"

"No, sir."

"To give you a claim upon the booty then?"

"No, sir, for you shall have my share."

"I'll agree to what you ask, lad."

"I thank you, sir."

"Now we will head at once for the island, so what course shall I put the *goleta* on?"

Ivan gave full directions for finding the island, and the craft was soon sailing for the secret retreat of Revello, the Mexican officer who had been living a double life for long years as naval commander and pirate as well.

The *goleta's* captain was only too glad to learn of the island, for his own retreat had been discovered by an American cruiser and half of his men captured, he barely escaping with the *goleta*.

If out of the way perhaps, the island retreat would be that much safer on that account.

So the skipper told his men what he had learned from the supposed boy and all were glad to know of it and congratulated themselves upon having picked up the craft and its sole occupant.

The next afternoon the island loomed up ahead, and in glancing carefully over it with his glass Captain Breeze said:

"Lad, that island has not a living being upon it."

"So it looks, sir, but the people are there."

"And the coast is like a wall of rock, with no place to run in."

"There is a channel, sir, and if you will give me the tiller I will take the *goleta* in."

"You know the way I hope, for these are mighty dangerous waters."

"I know the way in, Captain Breeze, and will not touch reef or bar," was the confident reply of Ivan, who then took the helm and headed for the island which did indeed appear to be deserted and barren.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE ISLAND RETREAT.

STANDING steadily in under the pilotage of Ivan, the *goleta* went swiftly along, for the breeze was blowing fresh astern.

The skipper and his crew watched the rugged island shores with deepest interest, for to them there appeared to be no break in the rugged walls of rock.

Then they glanced at Ivan to see that there was no hesitation in his face.

Nearer and nearer the *goleta* drew to the wall of rock, and as no break appeared the skipper asked anxiously:

"You are sure this is the island, lad?"

"Perfectly sure, sir."

"You do not see any channel?"

"Not yet, sir."

"Perhaps you are on the wrong side?"

"No, sir."

"If you do not soon show an opening you must go about."

"You fear to trust me, sir?"

"No."

"Then why go about?"

"These are dangerous waters for a vessel, and the skies look threatening."

"There's no break in that island, sir," gruffly said the mate, from forward.

"So I think."

"Come, lad, you have made a mistake in your island, so go about."

"Captain Breeze, take the tiller and hold her as she is until I get a flag from my traps in the cabin."

"I will then show you that I am right."

Captain Breeze took the helm, and Ivan darted into the cabin of the *goleta*.

He soon came out with a black flag, in the center of which was a red rapier.

This he bent on to the halyards, and ran up to the fore.

As it was shaken out, he ran back to the helm. Almost instantly on the island there was seen a flag run up upon a staff just raised.

It was a black flag, and it had a red rapier in the center.

The men of the *goleta* cheered then, and turning to Ivan gave him also a cheer.

"You are right, lad, only I don't see that opening yet," said Captain Breeze.

"And you will not until you get within a cable's length of the shore, sir."

"These are nasty waters for a boat to be caught in when it blows."

"Yes, sir, but there is a fine haven in the island."

The staff on the island that had been raised with the flag that was an answer to the one set upon the *goleta*, was now lowered by the two men who had shown themselves upon the summit of the isle, and once more no signs of life appeared there.

But the *goleta's* crew had confidence now in Ivan, and said no more in doubt of what he was about.

A short distance more the *goleta* ran, and just as Captain Breeze was about to take oath that there was no opening in the rocky shore of the island, and tell Ivan to go about, there appeared a break in the wall.

The men again cheered, and the *goleta* glided in through overhanging cliffs and was soon at anchor in a small basin, deep and thoroughly protected on all sides.

The men of the *goleta* saw shelving shores then covered with verdure, and a settlement of huts was visible among the trees.

Women and children were seen upon the shore, and a boat-load of men was coming off to the *goleta*, whose coming was not understood, though, as she had set the signal, no fear of her was felt by the islanders.

The boat soon drew near, and Ivan hailed:

"Ho, Senor Bravo, I have news for you!"

"Ah! it is you, Ivan, is it?" answered the man addressed, and he sprung upon the *goleta* and grasped the lad's hand.

"Yes, Senor Bravo, and this is Captain Breeze of the *Spray*, and he is a Bahama wrecker who picked me up at sea, for the brig was wrecked with all on board."

This news startled the man Bravo and those in the boat with him, and many questions were asked and answered.

"It will send up a wail ashore, this news will; but they have met a sailor's fate, Ivan."

"But I am glad to welcome Captain Breeze and his men, as all of us will be, when it is known he comes to ally himself with us."

"No, Ivan, you must go up to the cabin and tell the news to our queen, for I cannot."

"You see, Captain Breeze, we have a queen, the wife of our captain, and she is ruler here."

"She remained behind when the cruiser sailed, and she has not been well, for she has kept mighty close, and this news will hit her hard, I fear."

"You will tell her Ivan, for I cannot?"

"Yes, Senor Bravo, and I will leave Captain Breeze and his men to your care," answered Ivan, and soon after he was set ashore.

He was greeted by the people gathered there with welcomes and questions, but said that the queen would tell them all, and so hastened up the hill to a cabin standing apart from the others.

There, under a rude piazza sat a woman in black.

Her form was slender and graceful and the face was one of beauty.

As the other approached she arose and said eagerly:

"Welcome back, lady."

"Sh! I am still Ivan, and I have news for you, as soon as I can change to my own attire."

"Have you been suspected?"

"Not once."

"And my boy?"

"Is off with Linda in the island somewhere."

"Thank Heaven no harm has befallen him."

"Now come in and let us quickly make the change."

They entered the cabin and in half an hour reappeared, and it would take a very keen eye to note what change had been made.

What that change was their conversation will make known to the reader.

"Now, thank Heaven, I am again Lucille Revello, my natural self, and you are Ivan."

"I was recognized by my husband before the vessel was wrecked, and I will tell you what he did."

Then followed the story of the wreck and all that had happened.

"Now, Ivan, for you too a woman must still play the part of a boy until we can leave this island, I wish to thank you for your deep devotion to me and my boy."

"When your parents were found, with you, on a wreck, by Revello, and, brought here, allied themselves to these people, no one ever suspected you of being a girl, and it was wise in your father to dress you as a boy."

"The cheat, with your wonderful resemblance to me, has served me well, for it enabled me to

go as cabin-boy of the cruiser, while you remained here as the Island Queen, and you have played your part well."

"I have held aloof from all, senora."

"Well, now we are to go from here, for I have the pledge of the *goleta's* captain to do as I ask, and a different life is before us."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

SAFE IN PORT.

THE reader has thus seen how a maiden, playing the part of a boy, and from her striking resemblance to Lucille, the wife of Revello, the merciless Mexican, was enabled to deceive the commander of the cruiser, as was done.

"Lucille, going as Ivan De Sol, the cabin-boy, had deceived all up to the time of the wreck of the *Rattlesnake*."

"The African, Topaz, had been in her confidence, but when it came to a question of which he should cling to, his master or Lucille, he had chosen the former, as he owed to him his life, and left the latter to perish on the wreck."

The fate of the African and Revello has been seen, and also how Lucille, the wife deserted to die in chains on the wrecked brig, escaped both, and returned to the island retreat, where Ivan was playing her part, and where she had left her little son, Reginald, in the care of the faithful black nurse, Linda, who had fled with her from her home when she had sacrificed herself by becoming the wife of Rudolph Revello, a man without mercy for man or woman.

When they had talked over their clever ruse together, Lucille, as the cabin-boy is now known, arose to go in search of her boy, when they beheld coming toward the cabin the people of the island.

"You know the story, Ivan, as I have told you, so you must tell it to them, for they suspect something is wrong, and are coming to know about it," said Lucille.

The crowd of islanders, men, women and children, now came near the cabin, and Lucille said:

"My people, this young man has just brought to me the saddest tidings, for he has told me of the loss of the cruiser with all on board."

"He will tell to you the story, and how he happened to be in the cabin alone when the brig drove on a reef and was wrecked, and thus escaped with his life, while all others on the vessel were swept to a watery grave, my husband among the others."

"A wail went up from the crowd of women and children at this, to them, most startling and distressing tidings, and Ivan told the story as though he had been the actor in the terrible scenes."

Then Lucille spoke of the coming of Captain Breeze and his men in the *goleta*, and said that they should be welcomed.

The crowd then departed just as a negress came down the hill accompanied by a handsome boy of six, clad in sailor costume.

He too had known the cheat, that Ivan was not his mother, but had kept the secret well, young as he was.

Now he rushed into his own mother's arms, with the cry:

"My mamma! my mamma!"

Long he was clasped to her loving heart, a heart that was as brave as any man's; a heart that had known enough of sorrow to crush it, since she had become the wife of Revello the Rover.

Linda, the negress, also came in for a warm greeting from Lucille, and then they talked together until Ivan went down to tell Captain Breeze and his men that the Island Queen would receive them at her cabin.

Not a soul suspected the cheat, that the one who went as Ivan was not the one they had picked up at sea, and they went on with him up to the cabin.

There Lucille welcomed them, and told them she was glad to have such strong allies, while she said to Captain Breeze that he should remain as commander in the place of Revello.

"And now, captain," she continued, after he had dismissed his men to mingle among the people of the island, "Ivan tells me that you made him a promise?"

"I did, lady, and I'll keep it."

"Well, he will allow me to say what you are to do."

"Yes, lady."

"Now that my husband is dead I no longer care to remain on this island, so I desire you to give me, my little son, Ivan and Linda, passage to an American port in the *goleta*."

"What I hold here in property I yield to the people, you to share with them, while I will pay you well for your services."

"Now, captain, get your *goleta* in the best of trim for us, as I desire to leave the island one week from to-day."

"I'll do it, lady, only I am sorry to see you go," said the wrecker.

And then Lucille went around among the people, comforting them in their sorrows over the loss of those they loved on the cruiser, and told to them all that she was going away from the island forever, and would carry Ivan with her, as well as her boy and Linda.

They urged her against it, many of them saying that they would lose their good fortune when she departed.

But she was determined, and in just one week the *goleta* sailed away, half of the crew on board being the islanders.

Away sped the fleet craft, and her destination was the Balize, for there Lucille knew that she could overhaul and board some vessel bound up to New Orleans.

Nor was she disappointed in this, for a coaster packet was found, and the transfer from the *goleta* was made, the story being told to the American skipper that Lucille and her party had been picked up at sea from a wrecked vessel.

Away sailed the *goleta* back to her mission of lawlessness, and it may be well to remark just here that the islanders became noted as wreckers and law-breakers generally, while their descendants, now respectable citizens, still occupy the island and others in those waters.

As for Lucille she and those with her arrived in safety in New Orleans, and then Ivan sought relatives whom he had there and told the sad story of her parents' death among the islanders and how she had played the part of a boy for several years.

But once at home again, Ivan De Sol became her natural self, and as Miss Eva De Sol, a beauty and an heiress in her own right, was not long in winning her way as a belle in the society of the Crescent City, though no one suspected the romance of her life, as she kept it as a sealed book.

Having seen her island friend safe and happy among her kindred, Lucille Revello placed Linda and her boy in pleasant quarters and once more in the disguise of a boy, started forth upon a mission she was determined to accomplish.

That mission was to discover if Rudolph Revello had escaped death when he left his wrecked vessel that night of storm.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE RATTLESNAKE'S DOUBLE.

WHEN Rudolph Revello found that his crew would stand by him in anything that he did, he had, it will be recalled, set sail for Vera Cruz.

He had told them that they should rescue their chief and comrades from the *carcel*, for they had been already taken there he assured them, though he did not believe such to be the case.

In reality he thought that Captain Bertrando was then a prisoner in the hacienda of Don Ricardo while the men under officer Waldo had been hunted down and captured or killed.

Revello was a bold man, as has been seen, and he was one who made desperate moves to carry his point.

He had lost his own vessel, through no fault of his it is to be admitted, and now he intended to redeem himself in the eyes of all and more than do so by a daring stroke.

So he sailed for Vera Cruz under false pretenses to his pirate crew, but for that he did not care.

He had formed his plans and was already in a fair way to carry them out.

When the brig came in sight of the Castle of San Juan de Uloa, Revello signaled that it was the Mexican cruiser *Rattlesnake*, and so swept on up to an anchorage off the city.

He said to his men that he would go on shore to reconnoiter, and that no boat must be allowed to come alongside the brig under any circumstances.

When he returned he would know if their comrades were in the *carcel* and if it was possible for them to be rescued, while he would also make sure of robbing the banque of its gold on the same expedition.

"It can all be done within a couple of hours after we start about it, and the brig can be on her way out to sea before dawn," he had said.

And so he was set on shore, while the boat was told to return to the brig and only come when they heard his signal from the shore, and which was agreed upon.

The moment he landed Revello hastened with all dispatch to the quarters of the commandante of the port.

He found that august individual at home, and was granted an immediate audience.

"Glad to see you, Captain Revello, for we all felt most anxious regarding the safety of your vessel as the tornado that followed your sailing was the worst we have ever known, and the greatest damage was done by it."

"Yes, General Rivera, I lost my vessel in that same tornado."

This was startling news, while the general said:

"But it was signaled that the *Rattlesnake* was in sight at sunset."

"True, for it is so believed; but the vessel is the Double of the *Rattlesnake*, senor, and none other than the famous pirate craft of Bertrando, known as the *Ocean Rapier*."

"You astound me, Captain Revello."

"I will astound you still more when I tell you, senor, that I am in command of the buccaneer

craft, and have brought her in here to surrender her to you, or rather to obtain command of her with a different crew under me, for, excepting my slave Topaz and myself, all others on board are pirates."

The general was speechless with amazement, and then Revello went on to tell him the story of the wreck of his brig, with all on board, though he made no reference to the wife he had left in the cabin in chains.

He told of being picked up at sea by Bertrando, and what had followed to make him commander.

"I had hoped to plot at the hacienda of Don Ricardo Castile to capture Bertrando, General Rivera, but he upset my plans by deciding to have the Don go upon his vessel, and I knew what that meant."

"So I returned to the vessel, and began to plot anew."

"I ran to a retreat in Mobile Bay, refitted the brig, and then proposed to the crew to rescue their chief and comrades from the *carcel* here, and also to rob the banque."

"Captain Revello!"

"You understand, general, I was playing pirate and planning to capture that ship, for though in command, what could I do?"

"True."

"Now, the ship is here, and supposed to be my vessel, and I will land a force and march for the *carcel*."

"We will gain entrance, and you will have a force there to seize the men, while you can send another force off under me to seize the brig while her crew are ashore."

"Thus, general, we will get the brig and her pirate crew, while Bertrando himself is now a prisoner at Don Ricardo's hacienda."

"Splendid! you are a wonderful man, Captain Revello."

"This will make you more famous than ever."

"But now to work!"

The plan was soon arranged, and Revello started upon his return to his vessel.

He gave the signal, the boat put off for him, and he was soon on board the brig.

"It is all right, senors, for the chief and his party under Waldo are in the *carcel*, and we can rob the bank and rescue them at one blow."

"I will lead you, so get into the boats all but a few to remain in charge of the brig."

The men were elated at the news, and the boats soon pulled for the shore with muffled oars.

It was after midnight now, and that part of the town was as still as a graveyard.

The men landed, and Revello led them, past the bank toward the *carcel*.

"I will leave you at the *carcel* to gain admittance, and return with a couple of men to the banque, so as to have the gold out of the vaults and ready for you on your way back," he had said to the officer he had placed in command of those who were to enter the *carcel*.

So he left them at the *carcel* to gain admittance, and with two of the men he returned to the banque.

As they reached the door they were suddenly confronted by a file of soldiers, and in an instant the two pirates were prisoners, while Revello hastened on to the shore, where a party was waiting in the brig's own boats for him to go off as their leader, for so it had been arranged between the general and himself.

The men who had reached the *carcel* meanwhile had gained admittance, as they had said they were from the cruiser *Rattlesnake*, bringing pirate prisoners.

In they rushed to suddenly find themselves within stone walls, around which were a couple of hundred soldiers covering them with their muskets.

They had been well trapped by their new captain, that was certain.

CHAPTER L.

BERTRANDO'S PLOT.

THE schooner which had been seized by Waldo, and on board of which Captain Bertrando had been found, made the runs the chief had planned for it and safely anchored in the mouth of Very Cruz.

By a strange coincidence it had run in not two hours ahead of the buccaneer brig under Revello.

And strange was it also that Revello anchored not very far away from the supposed coaster.

Those on board the little schooner could hardly believe their eyes when they saw the brig come to anchor near them.

It startled them at first, for they felt sure that it was the cruiser *Rattlesnake*, which had not been lost as Revello had said to Bertrando and Waldo, who knew him.

They saw a boat put off for the shore and return, and then later they saw four boats leave the brig and row ashore.

What could it mean?

Bertrando at last decided to know if it was the *Rattlesnake* or the *Ocean Rapier*, for the more he looked at the brig the more he became convinced that it was his vessel.

"Waldo!"

"Yes, señor."
"I believe that Revello has dared venture in here in my brig."
"I feel sure that yonder craft is the Ocean Rapier, and I intend to find out."
"How can you, señor?"
"I will sing a song which the men all know so well, and if it gets a response on board the brig, for you know it is a signal song I have, then the craft is the Ocean Rapier."
"Sure, señor."

And then there broke out on the still air of the harbor a rich voice singing a Spanish cavalier song.

A movement was at once noticed on board the brig, and as soon as the song was hushed there came a reply in a tenor voice, another song, however, being sung.

"Wal-lo, it is my vessel."
"Revello has run her in here for some purpose, perhaps to entrap me and my men."

"Come, leave this craft and we will board the brig."

"If mine, then am I once more Demon of the Deep, and woe be unto Revello the Rover."

The boat was quickly lowered from the stern davits, and the chief and all on board armed themselves and crowded into it.

"Boat ahoy!" came from the brig as it approached.

"Bertrando," was the low response, and instantly came the words:

"It is as I said, the chief."
"Come aboard, señor!"

And as the boat moved forward once, more out from the shore shot those of the brig, returning.

But though Captain Revello was in one of them, the men who had gone ashore with him were not returning, for they were safe in the *carcel*.

"Hal! what boat is that boarding the brig?" he cried, and the order came for the oarsmen to pull still faster.

As they ran up alongside, Bertrando had reached the vessel and a word from one of the officers had told him all.

"Quick! hurl these devils back into the sea!" he cried, and as he spoke, Revello sprung on board to be felled to the deck.

At the same moment, the men who were following him were hurled back into the sea and willing hands kept the others from boarding, while a part of the crew ran forward, slipped the cable and set sail.

There were several who had followed Revello who got on board and were quickly made prisoners and tossed into the cabin, while Bertrando, once more on his own deck, and with his own crew about him, fought like the demon he was when aroused.

The cable was slipped and the brig was going seaward almost in a moment of time, sail being set as she went along, for nothing had been furled on board.

And the boats beaten off, when their leader Revello was lost, and which contained soldiers, not sailors, were glad to pull back for the shore where General Rivera had driven up in his carriage and was astonished at what he saw and heard.

"A boat-load of men, Señor General, boarded the brig from yonder craft, and Captain Revello was shot dead as he reached the deck and we were hurled back into our boats."

"I tried to lead the men on board the vessel, but the brig was moving, and being strongly defended we were forced back, señor."

The general gave orders to row out and capture the little schooner and then springing into his *volante* drove to the *carcel*.

There he found that the pirate crew had been captured, and next he drove to the signal-station.

But it was some time before a signal could be set and then the air was misty and if seen at the castle was not answered, while the brig was rapidly becoming more indistinct in the distance.

And thus did the bold plan of Rudolph Revello miscarry in the very moment of success.

CHAPTER LI.

A STRANGE VESSEL.

DON RICARDO CASTILE and Marcelite were very much worried over the escape of the pirates, whom they had certainly considered unable to do so under the circumstances.

The Don had some satisfaction in the fact his men had had with them, and who, if they were themselves losers, at least felt content over the loss inflicted upon the buccaneers.

The lugger was watched as she sailed away until she could be seen no longer, and then Don Ricardo said:

"Well, my child, that young pirate is worthy of a far better career than one of outlawry, for he has shown himself a very daring and skillful officer."

"Yes, father, and he is one who had every opportunity to make a name for himself had he so chosen."

"I do not understand you, my child."

"I recognize him, father."
"You know the pirate lieutenant?" asked the Don with surprise.

"Yes, father."

"Who is he, may I ask?"

"Do you remember some years ago at a ball in the City of Mexico, when I was hardly more than in my teens, how a young *ranchero* followed me about from place to place?"

"Yes, I do recall the circumstance, now you speak of it."

"Well, father, that young pirate officer is the very one who so haunted me as to cause me to dread him."

"He wrote me love letters which I dared not show to you, and some time afterward he fought a duel and killed the one he thus met on the field of honor."

"I remember, now."

"He was very wild, dissipated, and was forced to fly for some of his acts which got him into serious trouble, and since then I have never heard of him, but now know that he went to the bad and turned buccaneer."

"It is too bad that a man with all the attainments to make a name for himself and to cause men to respect him should thus go astray; but see, there comes a coasting craft very near inshore, as though to run into our harbor."

The Don pointed as he spoke to a small coaster seen beating close inshore, having rounded a point of land as though to head in for the lagoon, which was the harborage of the ranch.

There the lugger, which went to and fro for stores to the City of Vera Cruz, and the pleasure craft were kept, for the Don and Marcelite also were very fond of a cruise upon the Gulf in pleasant weather.

The vessel which had caught the Don's eye was of lateen rig and of not over thirty tons burden.

She was trimly built and sailed well, pushing her nose deep into the sea as she came along under a stiff breeze through the rough waters.

"Yes, father, the craft is coming into the lagoon."

"I hope we are not to have a visit from more pirates."

"No, they would not come by day, my child."

"It must be Captain Revello taking that means of coming to visit us," said the Don recalling how Captain Revello had last been at the ranch, and feeling that an explanation was necessary.

"I hope so, father, for after the charges made against Captain Revello I feel that he should come and explain all away, if he can."

"If he can?"

"Yes, father, so I said."

"Why you surely do not think he will be unable to do so?"

"I hardly know what to believe, father."

"Marcelite!"

"Yes, señor!"

"May I ask you a direct question?"

"Certainly, father."

"Do you really love Rudolph Revello?"

"At times I feel that I do love him devotedly, and then there comes over me a feeling that something is lacking."

"What it is I do not know, cannot explain even to myself, father."

"I have thought of late that you did not really love the man as you should, or as you should one whom you expect to marry."

"I think now that I do not."

"He may fully explain away any doubts you entertain of him now, since the coming of Bertrando the Buccaneer."

"It is not that wholly, señor, only I believe I am capable of loving some one else differently, far better than I do Rudolph Revello."

"Who is it, my child?" asked the Don in real alarm.

"No one, señor, for I have met no one else that I care more for than I do for Captain Revello."

"But still there is the idea in my mind, the feeling in my heart that there is some one."

"Then you should never marry Revello."

"If I feel this way you are right, father; but then it may be a sinful fancy of mine."

"I will await my next meeting with him, and then I will understand myself better."

"Well, Marcelite, as you know, Revello belongs to an old and respected family."

"He is in moderate circumstances, I suppose, though I have never been able to discover just how he stands financially, though that does not cut any decided figure with me, for you will have fortune enough for any one."

"Of course these reports about Revello I have not the slightest thought of, for they originate with his enemies, and he has many who are jealous and envious of him, especially since it has become known that you are to marry him."

"Yes, father, he has many foes, I admit."

"Well, I hope and believe all will come round right, my child; but see, the *goleta* is running in for the lagoon, so I will send horses down to bring up any one who may land."

The Don then called a servant, and he was dispatched with several led horses to the shore of the lagoon.

The little craft was soon seen to anchor, and

half an hour after the servant returned, accompanied by one person who had landed from the strange craft.

That one was a youth in sailor attire.

CHAPTER LII.

A VISITOR TO THE RANCH.

IN the one who returned with the servant sent to the lagoon, Don Ricardo saw a mere youth, scarcely over seventeen he seemed.

He was attired in sailor costume, wore a jaunty tarpaulin, and had a face that was striking in the extreme.

"My name is Ivan De Sol, señor," he said when the Don bade him welcome.

"You are welcome, Señor De Sol," was the quick and pleasant reply, and Don Ricardo wondered why the youth had come to the hacienda.

"His coming affects me strangely."

"I wonder what it means, for I feel that he has come here for a purpose, not by chance."

So mused Marcelite, and as she was present to the young visitor she caught his gaze fixed upon her with an expression that she could not read, a look which however seemed to read her inmost soul.

"Pray do not retire, señorita, for my visit to Don Ricardo you hold interest in also, for I confess that I have sailed here to see you both," said the youth, in a tone that was not at all ruffled by his years or surroundings as one might have suspected in one so young.

Marcelite calmly bowed and resumed her seat, while the Don said:

"Then your visit is not an accidental one, señor?"

"By no means, Don Ricardo."

"May I ask its nature?"

"I wish to find one Captain Rudolph Revello of the Mexican Navy," was the startling reply, for both the Don and Marcelite started.

"He is not here, señor."

"May I ask if you knew whether he escaped death in the wreck of his vessel some time ago?"

"His vessel wrecked, your say?"

"Yes, señor."

"I have heard nothing of this."

"Then you have not seen or heard of Captain Revello of late, Don Ricardo?"

The Don was silent.

Could he tell of the visit of Revello to the ranch in disguise, when he brought Bertrando the Buccaneer with him.

He would not tell of this, but he would find out when his young visitor had last seen the captain.

So he asked:

"When was this wreck, señor?"

The youth looked at a memorandum he carried, and gave the exact date.

"You are sure his vessel was wrecked?"

"I was on the vessel, Don Ricardo, at the time."

"Indeed, then you were one of the crew of Captain Revello?"

"I was, sir."

"And did you have reason to suppose he lost his life then?"

"I did not know how many escaped, señor."

"But I am anxious to know whether the captain did or not."

"He did not."

The youth sprung to his feet in his excitement at this statement, and cried:

"Are you sure of this, Don Ricardo?"

"Perfectly."

"Captain Revello did not die?"

"No."

"How do you know, may I ask?"

"I have seen him."

"Have seen Captain Rudolph Revello?"

"Yes."

"Commander of the Mexican brig-of-war, *Rathenaker*?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Within a very short while."

"There is no mistake?"

"None."

The young sailor took a quick turn back and forth for a minute, and then said:

"Don Ricardo, you will pardon my excitement, and my coming here when you know all."

"I will bear what you wish to say, señor."

"Pardon me, but may I ask you a few questions, and you not deem it officious?"

"Well, sir?"

"Is not Captain Revello engaged to marry your daughter here?"

"As it is no longer a secret, I may as well answer yes."

"Don Ricardo, this must not be."

"Señor!"

"I repeat it, Don Ricardo; this marriage must never take place."

"Pray explain, señor," said Marcelite, more calm now than was her father.

"I will explain, though it is a long story."

"Yet you must hear all, and you will heed."

"I wish to tell you that Rudolph Revello is an imposter, a man of no honor, a man living a double life."

These words fairly rung from the lips of the youth, and Don Ricardo arose betly and said:

"Senor, I will not hear my friend, who is absent, my son-in-law that is to be, thus abused by you, a stranger."

"It does you credit, Don Ricardo, to thus stand up for your friend, the man who was to marry your daughter; but then I wish you to hear my story, and when you have heard all, listen to the proof of what I tell you."

"Will you grant me this?"

"Yes, father, we will hear what the senor has to say," said Marcelite, and she spoke with strange calmness.

"Yes, senor, we will hear you, for there is something about you that causes me to feel that you would not willingly strike at the heart of this poor girl."

"I would save her from harm, from sorrow, for well I know that she had believed in one whom she believes to be the soul of honor."

"Which you say Captain Revello is not?"

"Senor, he is a snake in the grass, a man who leads, as I said, a double life."

"Years ago he wedded a young American girl dwelling upon the shores of Mobile Bay."

"Beware, sir!"

"I am meaning every word I utter, senor."

"Well, sir?"

"This girl bore the name of Lucille Lomax and her father was a well to do merchant, and dwelt there with his wife and only child."

"The Mexican officer led the maiden to marry him through threats of harm befalling her father, and yet she was not indifferent to him, fascinating and handsome as he was, though her heart was another's."

"She ran away with him upon his vessel, became his wife, and from that day a life of sorrow was hers."

"A child was born to them, and yet Captain Revello would not return her and their little boy to the home of her parents, that she might ask forgiveness of them."

"After seven years nearly had gone by he consented to do so, landing there at night."

"The home of her girlhood was a ruin almost, for her mother was dead through a broken heart, the servants gone away and her father yet haunted the place, though as a madman."

"She went to the house that moonlight night, carrying her little son with her, and found all desolation, the place deserted."

"A shot and a cry startled her, back where she had left her husband, and running thither she found that her Captain Revello had killed her father."

"My God! this is terrible," cried Marcelite, while the Don said almost savagely:

"If true?"

CHAPTER LIII.

THE MASK REMOVED.

"It is true, Don Ricardo, every word that I utter," said the youth, warmly.

"I came not here to lie to you and that beautiful lady, your daughter."

"You have the proof, you say?"

"I have."

"You will give it?"

"Yes."

"I shall demand it."

"You shall have it, senor."

"Go on with your story, if there is more to tell."

"I have not told the half."

"Shall we hear it, my child?"

"I wish to hear every word, father, that the senor has to say," was Marcelite's low and earnest response.

"I will not detain you long, senorita, or cause you more sorrow than is necessary."

"I wish to say to you that the father of Revello's wife in his madness may have attacked the Mexican officer, yet he was, nevertheless, his murderer."

"He had stolen from him his child, by his act breaking the mother's heart, and then taken his life, not to speak of the harm he had wrought upon the girl."

"Well, she went with him again to sea, she and her child, after all that had passed."

"But she had a motive, and it was revenge."

"The Mexican had deceived her, for, besides being an officer in the naval service of the country whose flag floated at the peak of his vessel, he was also a pirate."

"A pirate?" gasped Marcelite, while Don Ricardo cried:

"Have a care, young man!"

"I repeat it, Senor Don Ricardo."

"You accuse Captain Revello of being a pirate?"

"I do, sir."

"Though an officer of Mexico?"

"I do."

"You must produce your proof."

"I will do so in good time, senor."

"Captain Revello had an island retreat where he kept the people who served him and his piratical booty."

"Here his wife was known as queen, and here she and her boy were often left while the brig was cruising elsewhere."

"But she suspected that Revello intended to play her false, and when he left her again at the island that he meant never to return."

"So she went in disguise upon his vessel and he came hither, anchoring in the lagoon."

"He went then to Vera Cruz, and it was there his wife, in her disguise, arranged to have him fall into the hands of the Americans."

"She informed the captain of an American cruiser then in port of all she knew, and Revello was sent to sea by a paper forged and pretending to be from you, senorita."

"From me?"

"Yes, senorita."

"I do not comprehend quite."

"A letter purporting to be from you asked him to return here to you."

"He did so, and the American cruiser was lying in wait for him on the way."

"But that terrible tornado swept the Gulf and I have since learned that the American cruiser has never been heard of."

"The Mexican brig was caught in the tornado, dismasted and driven like an arrow to her destruction upon a reef."

"But Revello had recognized his wife in her disguise and he sought to punish her."

"From her he heard of her plan to entrap him, to prevent his sacrilegious marriage with you, and he had her put in double irons and placed in the cabin, chained to the mast, to go down with the wreck."

"Senor!"

"Have a care, senor!"

"I have a care, Don Ricardo, to speak only the truth."

"Captain Revello and his negro slave went on deck and left the woman thereto die."

"The vessel struck and the crew were washed into the sea; but you say that Revello yet lives, Don Ricardo."

"He does."

"Well, senor, he escaped death in some mysterious way while his crew did not."

"And this wife?"

"She too escaped, for he had dropped the keys of her manacles, in his hasty flight from the cabin and she freed herself."

"The tornado had blown itself out, she made a raft, was picked up at sea by a wrecker craft, visited Revello's island retreat, secured her child and escaped to New Orleans."

"There she left her child in the care of a faithful negress, one who had left her home with her and followed her sad wanderings, and she determined to discover whether Revello yet lived, and if so, to save you, senorita."

"She chartered a small vessel and sought you here, and—"

"Your proof! your proof!" cried the Don, aroused thoroughly and believing yet doubting the story.

"I am the proof, Don Ricardo."

"You!"

"I am Lucille, the wife of Revello, and if you will go with me to where we can face him I will prove all that I have said."

Words are inadequate to picture the scenes that followed this denouement of the young stranger's story.

It was indeed Lucille the buccaneer's wife.

CHAPTER LIV.

BEYOND ALL DOUBT.

To the amazement and delight of Don Ricardo, his daughter did not take the story of Lucille to heart as deeply as he had supposed and feared that she would.

She had listened to every word, drawing her own conclusion as she heard, and long before Lucille declared herself she knew that the speaker was a woman, that she was telling the sad story of her own life.

Her heart went forth to her in deepest sympathy, and she felt for her the greatest gratitude for having saved her from the fate of having been bound to Rudolph Revello by a mock marriage.

"I can hardly believe it all," said the Don, sadly.

"I believe it, father, in every particular."

"There is no mistake," answered Lucille.

"To think that after all he was a pirate."

"Would not one who denied this dear woman as he did, be guilty of any other crime, father?"

"Yes, my child, yes. I am sure that he would."

"Now, father, we must feel that he came here for a purpose, when he came as the companion of Bertrando, the Buccaneer."

"I cannot understand it."

"Lady, I will now consider that I need no longer keep the secret imposed upon me, and make known to you of Revello's coming here and what followed," said Don Ricardo.

"Then, he has been here?" eagerly asked Lucille.

"Yes."

"Since the wreck of his vessel?"

"He has."

"Will you tell me of his coming?"

"Yes, I will tell you all."

"And if you know where he now is?"

"I do not."

"I should like to hear all, Don Ricardo."

"Yes, father, tell all of the story," urged Marcelite.

"You shall hear and judge for yourself."

"Perhaps, together, we can come upon some solution of his movements."

Then Don Ricardo told the story of Bertrando's coming with Revello, and what followed.

The fight with the pirates under Waldo, the escape in the lugger, all was told, and then they talked over the matter seriously so as to find some solution to just what it all meant!

"Don Ricardo, it was Bertrando, the Buccaneer's vessel that was the twin ship of Revello's, and so it was that the piratical acts of the Mexican were thrown upon the pirate rover."

"I can tell you of Revello's escape from cruisers, when he was almost beyond hope of escape, by his daring and trickery."

"He is a very wonderful man, one devoid of honor, heart or feeling, and he is false alike to God, woman and man."

"He has deceived his Government and his countrymen, and he now seeks to enter into a mock marriage with your daughter, which, however, happy am I that I am in time to prevent."

"Yes, I can never forget you, never," murmured Marcelite.

"Nor I," the Don said, with deepest feeling.

After a while Don Ricardo asked:

"Now, my dear senora, you have a very level head and brave nature, so what would you propose?"

"To bring you face to face with Revello in my presence."

"But then?"

"He must no longer be a disgrace to the country he has pretended to serve."

"No."

"Don Ricardo, that man must go to the yard-arm for the crimes he has been guilty of."

Both Don Ricardo and Marcelite started at this, for it had not so come to them before.

"You mean that he should be hanged?"

"Why not, for is he not guilty of piracy?"

"Well, I will not be a bar in the way when he is proven guilty of the charge you make against him."

"But will you, unaided, and a woman, be able to prove all?" asked Marcelite.

"Yes, for I can pilot those to his late island retreat who can discover all for themselves, as, if his crew are all dead, there are those there who will know all and can be made to confess under the death penalty if they do not."

"Then, too, there are others, the negress who has my child, his child in keeping, and one other, a young girl who was his prisoner, though she was in male attire and supposed to be a lad the while."

"I owe much to her of my successful tracking of Revello in his villainy."

"Ah, yes, I can bring proof that he is all I have said he is, and far more."

"Then I will be guided by you, Senora Revello, in what you deem best to be done," said the Don.

"As I will," added Marcelite.

"Then go with me in my little vessel to Vera Cruz."

"The craft is fleet, comfortable and well fitted out for a cruise, so there is ample room for you and what servants you care to have accompany you."

"Will you do this, Don Ricardo?"

"What do you say, my child?" and Don Ricardo turned to Marcelite as though fearful she might accept the offer made by Lucille.

"I will accept the invitation of Senora Revello most gladly, father, for this matter must now be sifted to the very dregs," was the reply.

"Then the sooner we set sail the better, I take it, for all concerned," answered Lucille.

It having been agreed upon to sail in the little craft to Vera Cruz, preparations were quickly made and that night the vessel ran out into the lagoon upon her voyage, which was to be an eventful one.

CHAPTER LV.

TO ESCAPE DEATH.

WHEN Captain Revello rowed out to the buccaneer brig, flying the colors of his own vessel, and which he had so well planned to capture, he was met, it will be recalled by the reader, by none other than the pirate chief himself.

Not knowing that the Mexican cruiser had gone down, the buccaneer had naturally supposed that the vessel in port was the Rattlesnake until at last he was undeceived and found her to be none other than his own beautiful craft the Ocean Rapiere.

He had therefore decided upon the bold move of boarding and cutting him out, for he realized that Revello had run into port under false colors.

He reached his deck in safety, made himself known to his men, as has been seen, and met Revello and the boarding soldiers at the bulwarks.

He did not wish to kill Revello, and so he was allowed to board and then brought down with a stunning blow.

The soldiers, however, were hurled back into the sea, the cable slipped and away sped the cruiser down the harbor and out to sea.

She passed the San Juan de Uloa without the slightest suspicion on the part of the officers of the fact that she was other than the Mexican cruiser Rattlesnake going hurriedly out to sea again, from some news gleaned in port that demanded it.

Once he got the vessel well on her way, Bertrando had Revello placed in double irons and carried to the cabin.

Then he devoted himself to caring for the safety of the brig.

But there was no danger, no demand to fight off a foe, or run the gantlet of the forts, so that the buccaneer chief called his men about him and glanced them over.

He had as his devoted officer the Senor Waldo and one who had been left with the few men whom Revello had ordered to remain on board.

The goleta in which they had reached Vera Cruz had been left at anchor, crewless, and hastily stripped of all that they had cared to carry with them to the brig.

At last San Juan de Uloa was left astern, and the chief ordered the prisoner brought on deck.

He had recovered from the stunning blow he had received, and glared savagely at Bertrando in the light of the early morn.

"Well, Captain Revello, we meet again, do we?" sneered Bertrando.

"It so appears," was the answer.

"And this time I am the winner of the game we have been playing."

"Yes, you have me in your power."

"And I intend to put you to death by the cruelest torture."

"You will not surely show so little of manhood, pirate though you are, as to torture to death one who is in your power?" said Revello.

"I will do so."

"Shame on you! for, as man to man, you should give me a chance for my life."

"Did you give me a chance when you left me in the power of Don Ricardo Castile?"

"It was different, for you sought to destroy the woman I loved, to rob her father of his riches."

"Did you show mercy to my men when you ran my vessel in here, took them to the *carcel* and then came back to board and seize the craft with soldiers?"

Revello was silent at this.

"Answer me, I say! Did you show mercy to me or my men?"

"I am a Mexican officer, and as such it was my duty to capture you, knowing you to be pirates."

"I tell you, Revello, that you have been a traitor to your Government, to your people, and to all whom you have had to serve."

"You became an officer of my vessel by a bold stroke, and you very nearly cost me my life, the loss of my vessel, and the stringing-up to the yard-arm of every man of my crew."

"But you were foiled, and now I say to you that you are to die, and you shall die by a torture that will wring your heart and body with anguish."

"I will give you to-day to make your peace with Heaven, and this is showing to you a mercy you do not deserve."

"But you shall have the time I say, for I will have to think up just how to make you go out of life with the greatest suffering."

"Monster!" shouted Revello, and Bertrando the buccaneer's answer was a burst of derisive laughter.

The men then removed the prisoner to the cabin, and a guard was placed over him though in irons.

At once Revello began his plot to save himself, so he said:

"See here, my man, don't you know that as a pirate you will yet be strung up?"

"I'm thinking that may be my end, senor."

"Have you saved up much gold?"

"Only what you gave me, senor, when you were captain."

"Now, my man, I did not intend to sacrifice one of you, for my plan with the commandante at Vera Cruz, was to take the crew without killing any one by entrapping them in the *carcel* at the fort, and then securing those on board."

"This done you were all to be given your freedom by the Government on condition that you served me as a crew in the legitimate service."

"Do you see?"

"Yes, senor, I half-thought it was something of the kind."

"Now I want you to give up piracy and help me out."

"The entire treasure of Bertrando the buccaneer shall be divided among you few men now on the brig, if you will help me, and those in the *carcel* shall have their pardon as well as you, though you only on board here who aid me now will get the treasure on the brig."

"Yes, senor, it would be a snug fortune for each one of us," eagerly said the man.

"Well, think it over, and more, I will add to it every peso I possess to also go to you."

"Ab, senor."

"Now, when you are relieved from duty here pick out the men you believe will help me seize the brig."

"Yes, senor; but Captain Bertrando?"

"What of him?"

"He must not be carried back to be hanged, for he has been a good captain to us, senor."

"So be it; if you feel that way about it, I will let him go free, landing him at the nearest port out of Mexico."

"This will make the men feel better over their actions, senor."

"Well, tell them that he shall go free."

"And Senor Waldo and the other officers, senor?"

"Do you wish them to be set free?"

"Yes, senor, for the Government will not pardon the officers, you know."

"All right, I will set the officers ashore with their chief."

"And all the treasure on the brig will be divided among those who aid you?"

"Yes."

"And your treasure will be thrown in also?"

"Yes."

"Then, senor, you shall be a free man this day," was the answer of the guard, and Revello smiled grimly at his triumph.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE MUTINY.

THE guard over Revello had greedily drank in all the words of the prisoner.

He had believed all that he had said, and, tired of piracy, and fearful of ending his life upon the gallows, he was only too willing to escape it, if along with it he could get a handsome sum in treasure, and not prove a traitor to Bertrando and his officers by surrendering them with the vessel.

He now knew Revello as the commander of a Mexican cruiser, and who had played a bold game to get possession of the buccaneer vessel.

He was eager, therefore, to get off duty and have a talk with those of his comrades whom he could trust.

He felt very sure that there would be some who would side with the chief, but they must be taken by surprise, and either slain or tossed into the sea, and the more of them who were thus gotten rid of the larger would be the share of the faithful ones when the treasure was divided.

When relieved from duty at noon, the man hastened to carry out his plan by making known to the comrades he felt he could rely upon just what the plot was.

He left Revello to corrupt the other guard as best he could, and a signal had been agreed upon between them whether he was successful or not.

He had already unlocked the manacles of the prisoner, and placed his weapons where he could seize them the moment he decided to act.

One by one the man went among his shipmates, and in each case he made a successful hit, for not one could refuse the tempting offer of Revello under the circumstances.

There were upon the vessel, all told, just fourteen seamen, with Bertrando, Revello, Waldo and another officer.

Perhaps when the stand was made there were more who would join Revello, upon knowing the situation; but Bertrando, Waldo, another officer and several of the men were sure to hold out.

If allowed to go ashore at the nearest port out of Mexico, the men might yield.

But then it might end in a battle to the death upon the deck of the brig.

What Bertrando was plotting meanwhile as the means of torture to be used to put the prisoner to death no one knew; but in the afternoon the weather became thick, the clouds looked black and threatening, and needing all his men to work his vessel, he decided to put an end to the prisoner.

So he bailed the guard and told him to bring Captain Revello on deck.

He did so, but not as Bertrando had expected, for suddenly Revello rushed upon deck, and from his lips broke the cry:

"To the rescue, men, for pardon and treasure!"

It was the rallying cry of the mutineers agreed upon, and instantly it was answered by loud shouts.

Revello was armed with cutlass and pistols, and rushed toward Bertrando.

Though taken completely by surprise, Bertrando also gave a rallying cry, and instantly his officers and half the crew sprung to his side, and there they stood glaring at those who faced them, under the leadership of Revello, who called out:

"Come, men, it's a pardon and division of treasure if you side with me!"

"Men, don't turn traitor, but let us recapture that dog of a Mexican, and those mutineers who have sided with him."

"Come! see, there rushes a storm upon us, so let us get rid of our work quickly, and then save the brig!"

The backers of Bertrando answered his words with a yell, and all made a rush at Revello and his men.

The man had left the wheel and joined in the combat, and the brig came to with a lot of canvas aloft, and a storm rushing down upon her.

But the blood of the pirates was up, and about equally divided, they began to fight with desperation.

Nearer came the storm, until it struck the brig savagely, tearing out her masts, and nearly throwing her upon her beam-ends.

But still the maddened buccaneers fought on, dying one by one, bleeding from wounds, and unheeding that their vessel was a wreck upon the waters, wildly tossed about at the mercy of the waves.

Did they waver upon either side for an instant the master spirits that ruled them again urged them on and it became indeed a battle of giants, a fight for the mastery between Bertrando the buccaneer and Revello the Rover.

CHAPTER LVII.

CONCLUSION.

THE little vessel bearing on board Lucille and her guests, Don Ricardo Castile and his daughter Marcelite, had been caught in a severe blow soon after leaving the lagoon, which had driven her far off her course.

It was the second day after the storm, and while beating back on her course to Vera Cruz, that the lookout aloft had startled all with the cry:

"Wreck ho!"

At once every eye was strained to see the wreck.

It was over two leagues away and that of a large vessel.

As the vessel drew nearer it was seen to be armed, and that her masts had been torn out of her.

There were large holes in her bulwarks, where her guns had broken through, when she was tossed about by the storm, and she appeared to be settling very fast.

Suddenly a cry from Lucille startled all.

"It is the brig!" she said.

"What brig?" eagerly asked Don Ricardo.

"The buccaneer brig!"

"The craft of Bertrando!"

"The Ocean Rapier!" came reply.

The vessel was soon run alongside of the wreck, for the sea was smooth now and only a light breeze was blowing.

What a sight presented itself to the gaze of Lucille, Don Ricardo and Marcelite who boarded.

There was no living soul on board.

But the dead were there, and they had died in a last death-struggle.

Between the other dead lay two forms.

One was Revello the Rover, and his sword was thrust into the heart of Bertrando the buccaneer, the hilt still grasped in his dead hand.

In the grasp of Bertrando was a pistol, from which he had fired his last shot when he felt that his time to die had come, and the bullet had crashed into the brain of Revello.

Thus each had died by the hand of the other.

It was a scene from which Don Ricardo quickly led Marcelite, and from which he also turned sick at heart.

And not a moment too soon, for the wreck gave a lurch, causing all to hasten back to the little vessel, which at once fell off to prevent being engulfed by the sinking of the Ocean Rapier.

One mighty plunge the wreck gave and down she went forever beneath the blue waters of the Gulf.

"At last he is dead."

"You are saved, Senorita Marcelite, and I am avenged," said Lucille.

And back to the ranch sailed the Don and his daughter, while Lucille went on to Vera Cruz alone and got proof of all she had said; but as it was best to let the dread secret of Revello's life remain a secret still, it was kept from the public eye, and those who learned of the wreck of his own vessel, and how he had tried hard to capture the buccaneer, gave him the name of a noble and daring man, for the tale of the finding of the Ocean Rapier a wreck had been told to the commandante in a letter from Don Ricardo which Lucille had borne to him.

And Marcelite was content to live the life of a recluse, happy alone in the love of the father who loved her so well, and who mourned the death of his brother as Bertrando the buccaneer, a scourge of the Gulf in his fleet brig the Ocean Rapier.

And the wife of Revello? When her own eyes had shown her that her buccaneer husband was dead, she had gone back to New Orleans, and soon after an elegant home went up at Red Cliffs, the home of her girlhood, and there she was content to pass the last years of her life, keeping from her boy the dread secret that he was the son of Revello the Rover, and whose inheritance had been the pirata treasure hidden back in the hills, and the secret hiding-place of which was only known to Lucille, the bride of the merciless Mexican.

THE END.

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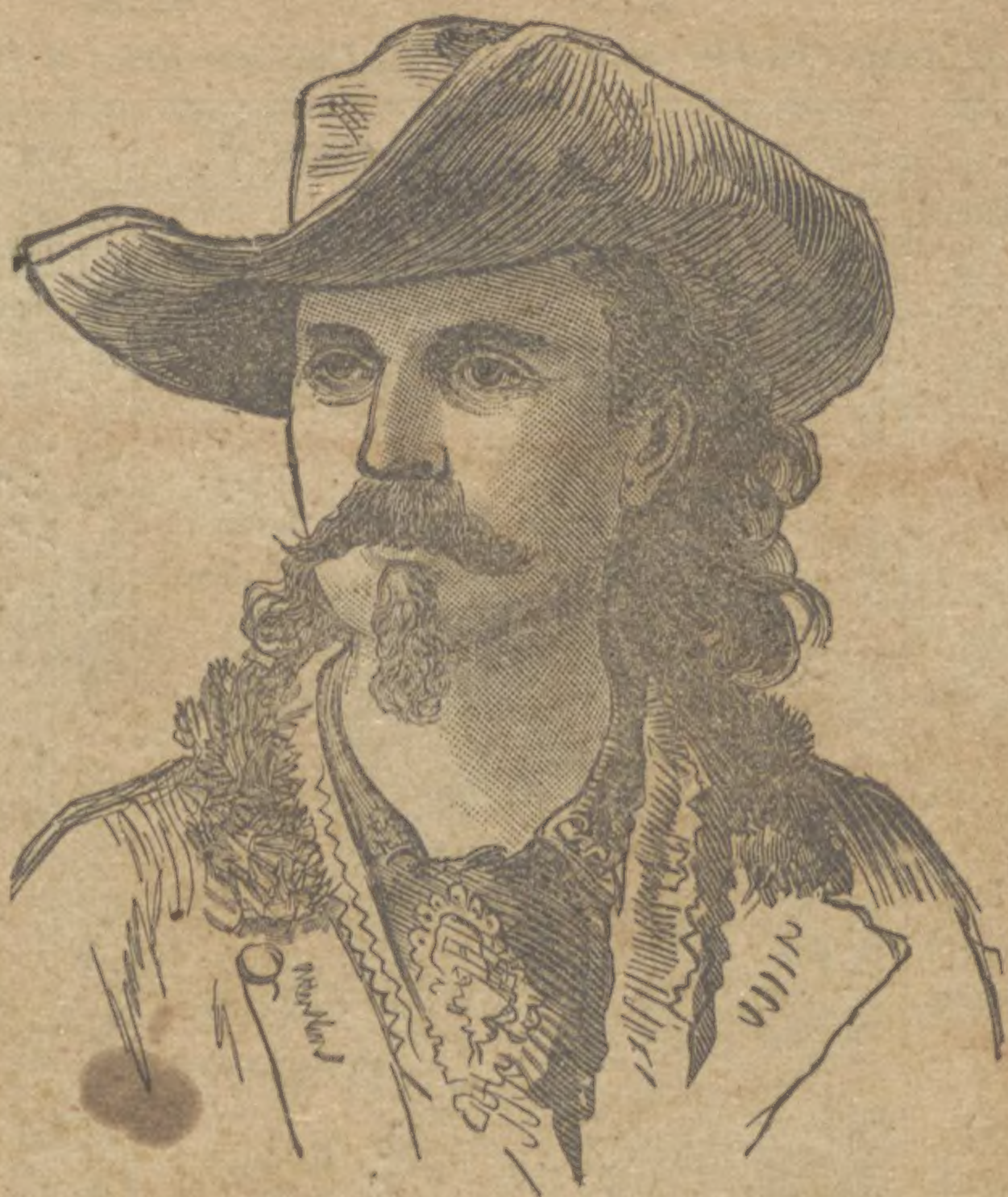
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